

MAY SYMPOSIUM

HOPEFUL FEAR & FEARFUL HOPE:

A POLAR PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Hope and fear are both motivators and evidence suggests that they both have instinctive and cognitive components to them, and that primal fears have primal hopes at their opposite axis. There is also strong evidence to suggest that they are always felt together and one can transform into the other as the perspective changes which is seen when we hope that something is going to happen – we will fear that it won't and when we fear that something is going to happen – we hope that it won't. This link is expanded within the creation of a polar model of hope and fear and an emerging theory that hope and fear are aspects of the same emotion separated only by perspective. Hope and fear both have a purpose and where fear is concerned, many believe that it is evolutionary. This paper explores the concept that hope is also evolutionary and serves as a moderator to fear - which is designed to move us away from danger, but where the weight of fear becomes too much and where an inertia results. In this context, hope seems to emerge instinctively as a “lightening agent” and antidote to the fear.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a unique perspective on hope and fear - which considers a positive and negative aspect to both. This aspect and the emerging theory intrinsically link the emotions of hope and fear together, and this link is represented in the creation of a polar model and theory. In summary, the polar theory suggests that when we “hope that something WILL happen”, we will “fear that it WON'T” and conversely when we “fear that something WILL happen” then we hope that it WON'T”. When we consider this unique perspective, there is compelling evidence to suggest that where there is

hope there is also fear and where there is fear then there is hope. They are never seen apart and without the other and they seem to be able to switch back and forth from one to the other. At times hope and fear seem to be distinct emotions, but there is evidence to suggest that this may be at best a matter of perspective rather than a tangible difference. It may be said that hope and fear are the Clark Kent and Superman of emotions inasmuch as although they wear very different outfits and they exhibit very different extreme polar personalities – there is evidence to suggest that they are in fact one and the same!

To further understand the potential links between hope and fear, this paper also explores their origins and purpose and the emerging parallels between the two, and this exploration digs further into the fertile soil that was ploughed by Snyder (1991). Not so obviously, a potential link between the state of flow and the right amount of hope and fear, in the pursuit of a goal is also discussed within the paper.

HOPEFUL FEAR AND FEARFUL HOPE – IS THERE A LINK?

Let's consider the evidence:

- They are both motivators, one towards something and one away from something.
- They are both felt when an event has either positive or negative outcomes that are impactful and, or meaningful to the individual.
- Physiology doesn't lie! They both cause anticipatory physiological responses which are uncannily similar, i.e. sweaty palms, excitement, and trepidation. The only difference is the fact that one outcome is desired and the other is not!
- They are both felt where meaningful consequences require action from the individual, yet where total control of the outcome is not possible and therefore there is an element of speculation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research dates back to the 1970's where Margaret Matlin and David Stang (1978) created the Pollyanna principle which suggests that people are inherently optimistic and hopeful in nature.

Moving on from this, professors Shelly Taylor and David Brown (1988) considered "positive illusions" where it is suggested that most healthy people are biased towards a positive view of themselves and the world around them. Hope has been extensively studied by Snyder (2003) and hope theory suggests that hope is based on the ability to plan and create pathways despite obstacles and the trait, referred to as "agency" or motivation to get there.

Segerstrom, (2005) emphasises the positive affect of hope and optimism on health in the form of immunity, blood pressure and mortality. Marshall and Brown (2008) suggest that positive illusions translate into greater persistence with work related tasks, where the tasks are not overly difficult.

Considering the above, research suggests that this beneficial state and positive self-view is often held on to by a process of self-deception (Chang, 2010). Chang suggests that the reality is that our skills and attributes that we hold as highly positive are often more normative and not exceptional. Within the research Chang suggests that our futures are actually fairly negative when you consider the deaths, loss of health, declining earning ability, loss of friendships and ultimately death – self-deception is an essential coping strategy as a defence mechanism and positive illusion. An example would be denial of our own mortality and even faith in something thereafter without proof, this may be a key reason for the existence of hope.

Optimism and hope:

There are currently two schools of thought regarding optimism: Optimism has been described by Carver & Scheier, (2007) as a broad personality trait where a generally optimistic side is dominant, whereas Peterson and Barrett, (1987) suggest that it is an explanatory style. The former is the mind-set where it is expected that more good than bad will occur, whereas the latter suggests that even where negative events occur, the optimistic person will hold on to their optimism and find optimistic coping strategies. It is also suggested that a positive person under

the optimistic explanatory style will tend to attribute failure to being the fault of circumstance, whereas the pessimist will attribute failure to their own flaws and take a negative self-view.

Further suggested reading:

Expectationism, risk homeostasis theory and time perspective Wilde (2001) suggests that the perceived value of the future impacts the level of risk that an individual is willing to take.

Kahnemann & Tversky loss aversion studies / cumulative prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979)

Lopes security potential and aspiration theory (Lopes, 1999)

The rules of hope (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990)

The psychology of hope (Snyder, 2003)

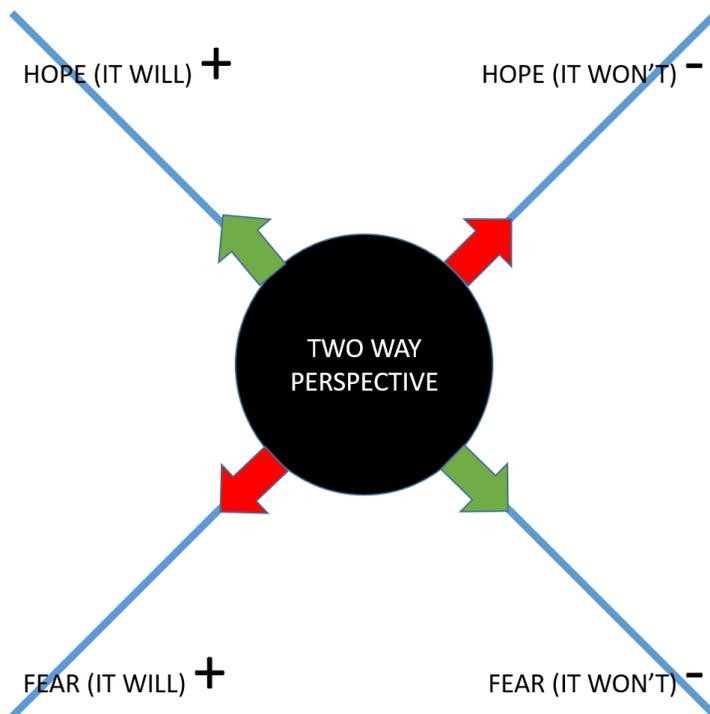
Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

The emotional brain: Fear and the Amygdala (LeDoux, 2003)

THE POLAR THEORY OF HOPE AND FEAR

The polar theory of hope and fear is represented within the polar model, fig 1 below:

FIG 1:



The polar model

The polar model of hope and fear has been designed to illustrate the links between hope and fear and their polar opposite states. Hope Positive (Hope +) and Hope Negative (Hope -) are essentially hoping that something WILL, or hoping that something WON'T happen respectively. Fear Positive (Fear +) and Fear Negative (Fear -) are fearing that something WILL, or fearing that something WON'T happen respectively. Clearly, where one hopes that something WILL happen and therefore experiences Hope+ one will be simultaneously fearing that it WON'T happen and therefore experiencing Fear -, or visa-versa. When you look at the opposite axis, where one fears that something will happen, they will also hope that it won't and visa-versa. The polar model is simple, and yet the message is quite profound inasmuch as it displays magnetic polar attraction in the two emotions of hope and fear, and the fact that the positive and negatives

attract, whereas two positives and two negatives actually repel and wouldn't tend to naturally attract each other. An example of this is that if you hoped for an outcome, and were sure that you wanted it, you would not also fear that outcome, and if you did – it may suggest a lack of clear resolution on the goal, or within the individual. The model also demonstrates that hope and fear are not only linked, but that they are essentially the same emotion separated by perspective. An example would be hoping that something is going to happen becoming fearing that it won't simply by changing the perspective along the emotional axis.

To further understand hope and fear, we first have to define them and understand their origins and purpose. Hope and fear are both felt in anticipation of either something good, or bad happening. They are both motivators, although one creates a goal or outcome that we want to move away from (fear) and one is a goal that we move towards (hope) (Snyder C. R., 2003). If we consider the physiological effects of fear and hope, they can both cause excitement, sweaty palms, rapid heart rate as we approach the outcome, and yet hope seems to have the unique effect of opening the mind, whereas fear seems to close it and focus it. That feeling of being in the zone, excited but performing at an off the chart level, the sharpened constantly thinking fast mind of the athlete on a winning streak and “in-the-zone” could be attributed to a hopeful and optimistic mind-set, that is also tinged with the right amount of fear, a hopeful fear if you like. Too much pure fear on the other hand can make us feel crushed, send us into a downward spiral, a losing streak, it can make our mind clam up and get stuck, freeze, we can't think anymore, we would hope for the situation to end, we may hope for a positive outcome, but this would be a fearful hope... The concept of having just the right amount of excitement, difficulty and engagement to create a state of flow, is a concept that was created and explored in some depth by Csikszentmihalyi, (1990) and the concept of the flow channel. Within the concept of flow and this channel, it was explained that when an individual undertook a task, whereby the levels of difficulty and therefore the need to focus on the task in hand, were high enough, when compared to the ability of the individual and yet not too high as to cause discomfort, or too low to cause boredom, a state of flow ensued. When the levels fall within the “flow channel”, the experience of a state of flow was felt and seemed to be absorbing, empowering, would open the mind and so on. There seems to be a link and a parallel here to Snyder's hope model, whereby the individual has agency and pathway thoughts, i.e. a will and a way to attain the goal, and that if the will and the way carried enough mass when compared to the mass of the goal, a hopeful state would arise. Perhaps there is a “channel” or optimal level of will and way which is similar

to that found within the flow model. Perhaps a hopeful perspective gives us a sense of control, of owning the direction of travel, a boat with a voyage in mind and sails catching the winds of hope - whereas with a fearful perspective, we are a boat with no power and the under control of the waves of fear. Perhaps the channel whereby there is an optimal level, and mix of hope and fear has bearing on this perspective. That level of “hopeful Fear” that a high level sports person feels as they approach their goal of winning the match... What happens when the “hopeful fear” becomes “fearful hope” and drops the other way? Perhaps this is where the nerves get to the athlete, they are no longer empowered, fuelled and driven by the feeling, they are encumbered, drained and crushed by it... Within the purest sense, hope can be “hopeful” and fear can be “fearful” but it is rare, if at all that they appear in their purest form. As soon as one becomes hopeful and where a goal has true importance to us, the closer we get to realising that goal, the more the hope has the potential to be affected by fear and to become fearful. On the flipside, where we experience fear in the purest sense, we will often turn to hope for solace, lest we are overwhelmed by the fear.

The origins of fear:

With the above in mind, let's explore the purpose and origins of fear:

There are five fears that we all share and that are the origins of all other types of fear:

- 1) Extinction – The fear of death, of ceasing to exist
- 2) Mutilation – The fear of damage to our physical body
- 3) Loss of Autonomy – The fear of the loss of control either explicitly or of the circumstances, such as being imprisoned, enveloped, immobilised etc.
- 4) Separation – abandonment, loneliness, rejection, Isolation
- 5) Ego-death – the fear of shame, embarrassment, loss of integrity relating to our sense of self.

The above fears could all be considered as primary fears that seem to be inherent within all of us very naturally and without a huge amount of cognitive thought. Many other fears are labelled in complicated ways, and yet they stem from simple origins. An example would be a common

phobia in the form of fear of heights. This is essentially the fear of extinction with the cause being a fall from height. Jealousy is another example of a very common fear which originates from the fear of ego death and our own sense of worth being devalued when compared to that of another. When you explore the concept of fear further, you realise that fear exerts a massive influence over many parts of our lives, and contrary to its original use within a survival context, it can actually stop us from moving forward to avoid the feeling of fear from being created. We essentially start to fear the fear! Manifestations such as not asking for a raise at work, avoiding social situations where we may actually move forwards, through fear of fear all originate from fear of ego death.

And now – the other side of the coin:

The origins of hope:

Perhaps the earliest origins of hope sit within the concept of faith and religion. It appears that the concept of having faith in there being more than just this physical life is universal across cultural divides and perhaps something that is within human beings at a genetic and evolutionary level. One of the common denominators is that hope and faith seem to emerge where there is a sense of a lack of control and influence in an outcome whereby the outcome has significant meaning or impact to us. In hoping, we are surrendering our trust that the outcome will be a good one, where we have lost, or have little perceived ability to influence the outcome. Hope therefore cannot exist where we have reason to believe that we have a definite and guaranteed way forwards, and control over the outcome. At the extreme end of this thought process, the concept of hope being born where there is little or no logical “way” – would seem to be contradictory to hope theory, where it is suggested that hope consists of agency and pathway thinking, or a “will and a way” (Snyder C. R., 2003). Where we start to suspect that the outcome will be a bad one for us, we start to fear this outcome and focus on the probability of this outcome happening. From this fearful mind-set, it is possible to shift the perspective from fearing that the outcome will happen and actually start hoping that it won't. This shift of perspective may be argued as purely semantics and therefore relabelling fear. On the other hand there is a counter argument that suggests that the shift of perspective goes beyond relabelling and this shift in perception actually creates a different state within the mind, and a state that is more useful in terms of finding a way forwards – despite the odds. If the latter argument is true then one would expect very different feelings to be experienced from one

perspective to the other, together with a differing level of ability, or different agency and pathway thoughts.

Faith and hope

Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is common for people who are faced with certain doom, to turn to prayer during this time, despite having never previously declared nor practiced a religion. In praying, we are hoping, despite all logical evidence, that there will be a miracle. We pray in these circumstances in order to seek a degree of comfort, and it certainly appears that comfort is derived from this, at times, illogical hope. Is the concept of hope therefore delusional and therefore a positive illusion, and if so, is it dangerous? This is an idea that was suggested and explored by Chang, (2010). I would suggest that it is actually evolutionary and that as previously mentioned, fear on its own can be counterproductive, whereas a hopeful fear can channel the mind and create an environment where the individual can maximise their inner potential and focus their way through a potential problem or potential danger. Is hope therefore a moderator to fear? This is an interesting argument where the idea of fear becoming too much to invoke meaningful action and hope therefore emerging and moderating the fear just enough to overcome inertia.

Linking hope and fear through purpose

Perhaps in considering that hope and fear are linked, we may look at hope positive as the focus on a positive goal or event actually happening, which could be viewed as hope in its pure form. Hope negative, on the other hand, is hoping that something doesn't happen. Fear positive would be the fearful focus on the possibility of an unwanted event occurring, which could be considered as a common perspective of fear, and perhaps a fairly pure form. Fear negative, however would be the focus on the possibility that a wanted event may not happen, when we hope that it will, and this type of fear will be seen at the opposite axis of hopefulness.

Perhaps one purpose of hope is to overcome the crippling inertia and "freeze" effect so often invoked when the weight of fear is simply too much to move us. In this context, hope can be considered as an agent to lessen the weight of fear. Hope can also be reinvigorated by fear as the hope levels start to waiver. When we hope that something will happen, the fear that it may not can drive us harder and with renewed vigour to be able to stay motivated!

PRIMAL HOPE VS PRIMAL FEAR

When we considered the five fears that we all share, perhaps there are also five hopes that we share which are the polar opposites of the fear, sharing the same basic roots and origins:

- 1) Living – The hope of life and existing
- 2) Health – The hope of health and vitality
- 3) Autonomy – The hope of freedom
- 4) Connectedness – being connected to others
- 5) Ego – the goal of being proud and having self esteem

Links between hope and fear.

When you look at the table below, it can be seen that for each one of the fears that we all share, and the fears from which all others stem, we can see that there is a hopeful counterpart. Each counterpart is the direct opposite of the other and it is difficult to think of a hope or fear that does not stem from this root! Perhaps if another hope was discovered, it would also give rise to a counterpart fear and vice versa...

HOPE	FEAR
EXISTENCE	EXTINCTION
HEALTH	MUTILATION
AUTONOMY	LOSS OF AUTONOMY
CONNECTEDNESS	SEPARATION
EGO	EGO DEATH

In summary, we have primal fears that we all share as human beings, and we have primal hopes. These primal hopes are the opposites of the fears and therefore the link is demonstrated very clearly in the table above. The primal hopes above exist because of the primal fears and they are actually the primal fears through a positive perspective. They are one and the same, just a

different perspective and aspect of the fear, just as the fear is an aspect and different perspective of the hope. If we fear the loss of autonomy, we therefore demonstrate that we do not want to lose the autonomy, ergo – we WANT autonomy and therefore we hope for this. Are hope and fear simply want and want not's? If we fear separation then we therefore want to be joined and connected and this is therefore a "hope".

Which one is the better motivator?

Perhaps one of the biggest differences between hope and fear is the fact that fear tends to motivate us to act far more rapidly. An example would be whereby we hope for health, but this hope doesn't tend to motivate us to go and see a dentist or doctor preventatively. As soon as we are faced with illness, we will rapidly go to the doctors and take action. We therefore react to our fears rather than our hopes. It is an interesting question: "How much better would our lives be if we reacted to our hopes rather than our fears"? Perhaps some people actually do and perhaps this is what separates those hopeful inspirational achievers from the fearful reactive masses. "We hope vaguely but we fear precisely", and this means that just as fear focusses and narrows, hope opens and broadens the mind. We need to experience fear an element of fear to experience hope, and yet if we give in to this fear, and live in a state of fear – it can crush us. We should therefore aim to live in a state of hope and hopefulness.

Why does Fear seem to dominate Hope?

Science has gathered evidence of primary and secondary emotions and positive and negative emotions. The science suggests the separation and evidence due to the different neuro-psychological origins and, so far, fear is considered to be a primary emotion which does not require cognitive intervention and processing, and hope a secondary one requiring cognitive processes. This argument can be challenged by considering that whilst there are primary fears, there are also fears that are born of cognitive processes which can be demonstrated in the creation of phobias and the potential for the cure of these phobias by psychological interventions. There is a solid argument therefore for both primary and secondary fears. If this is true, then hypothetically, there is also an argument for primary and secondary forms of hope.

It is suggested that fear as a primary emotion will override hope as a secondary emotion in times of extreme perceived threat, and that this emotion is activated spontaneously and based

on past and present affective experiences (LeDoux, 2003). The emotion of hope, however, requires complex secondary cognitive processes based on deliberate thinking and positive affective components (Snyder C. R., 1991). Snyder suggests that hope has a rationality to it, and that it is felt when a positive goal is expected. The limitations with this approach, and indeed the counter argument is suggested where hope is felt in the yearning of relief from negative conditions (Lazarus, 1999). Perhaps Snyder's theory on hope and the affective components of goal directed agency and pathway thinking suggest a complex cognitive process which contains both positive and negative components. The negative components may involve the individual's perceptions of the potential struggle, size of the issue and the weight of their own abilities in contrast and this "weighing up" may result in a positive or negative estimation of ability to reach the goal. In the positive form, hope can spring and in the negative form, fear can emerge. This is where the argument becomes dichotomous, however as in the most extreme negative form, whereby the weight of the individuals own will and "agency thoughts" and way forwards "pathway thoughts" is dwarfed by and no match for the weight of the issues, one would expect fear of certain defeat to be the victor, and yet, hope can emerge victorious and completely irrationally!

Irrational hope VS Irrational fear.

This is where hope and fear seem to share yet another aspect. Just as there is rational and irrational fear, there can be rational and irrational hope. Rational hope can be linked to hope theory, and the agency and pathway thinking suggested by Snyder (1991). Irrational hope, however seems to be the missing part of this puzzle and where there has to be faith. Faith is born of uncertainty and faith cannot exist where there is "proof", just as the light of irrational hope is brightest in the darkness!

The table below (Fig 2) shows the suggested links between hope and fear and the similar primary and secondary, rational and irrational components that they share.

FIG 2:

HOPE		FEAR	
Irrational hope	Knowing that failure is certain and yet hoping, having faith and feeling positive anyway	Irrational Fear	Fear of a picture of a spider, even when you know that it is a picture and cannot harm you
Secondary or Rational Hope	Weighing up your will and way against a problem and feeling confident that you will prevail	Secondary or Rational Fear	Perceiving danger based on your understanding of past experience and logic. An example would be a house fire and being faced with getting out as quickly as possible.
Primary Hope	The instinctive hope that this life is not the end and that there is something more. The yearning for meaning in our existence. The five hopes we all share. The tendency to want to self-actualize.	Primary Fear	The five primal fears we all share. The instinct to move away from danger.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it would appear that there is a link between hoping that something will happen and fearing that it won't and fearing that something will happen, and hoping that it won't. The links that are described by the emerging theory of the polar model of hope and fear, suggest that there is not a clear divide between hopefulness and fearfulness, but rather that they are interchangeable, depending on the perspective that is taken, and that the closer that one gets to the extreme axis of one, the more likely that it is that one will look back at the opposite end of the axis and experience the "polar opposite" emotion. This link between hope and fear, goes beyond a model of how they seem to operate, and the question of their purpose as being motivators to either move toward or away from goals, together with the fact that they seem to work very well together – with fear pushing us and hope pulling us away from danger, or towards success. Fear has long been considered a basic primal emotion, and one that has primary and secondary characteristics, with the primary emotion of fear requiring no cognitive input, and the secondary one being the result of cognition. The primal / primary and instinctive components of certain fear has been considered as one of the main separators of the emotion of hope and fear by researchers, and yet there is evidence that hope also has primal origins and primary and secondary characteristics. There is an argument to suggest that hope and faith are actually instinctive and genetic in nature. Further research is needed to understand the full breadth, and depth of the emotion of hope, and its positive and negative aspects.

Further Research

Within my dissertation and research project, the various dimensions and aspects of hope will be explored in much greater breadth and depth. Semi structured interviews will be conducted, which aim to explore the positive and negative aspects of hope in the context of towards and away from goals that have intrinsic meaning to individuals, and that have been experienced in the past. The interviews will explore hope levels that were felt in anticipation of the goals at various stages, together with perception of the prospect of succeeding and failing and the resulting emotions.

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