

Countering Stage Fright

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Hello students, welcome to my next lecture on the introduction to countering stage fright, and we were discussing that: is it fright or is it anxiety or phobia, and what are the differences between anxiety or fear, and how to minimize this, how to neutralize this, because this is not a new thing. But when the anxiety level is very high, the fear is quite abnormal. Then it is very important or quite necessary to see the expert to reduce the symptoms. So, as I was discussing earlier about anxiety, generating factors in the form of social anxiety will also begin to influence our behavior. Anxiety is also accompanied by other negative emotions such as nervousness, hopelessness, anger, depression, and there are several factors that are responsible to make a person normal or completely depressed, or a successful person. So, we need to know about this- what are the factors? When we talk of social anxiety or anxiety-generating factors, we need to know about moral fear also.

Moral fear is, to some extent, also a kind of social anxiety. The social mirror is internalized here. The judges who evaluate our behavior and follow our every step go inside and become an integral part of one's personality. The transition from the outside to the inside is associated with some reflection distortion.

Well, the internalized social mirror usually has a strong magnification compared to the external mirror, which is expressed in popular statements that a person is the strictest judge, the most strict judge for himself or herself, and sometimes also an executioner. And in the fear of disintegration between a human and the external world- a specific structure is created in the psychological literature called information metabolism. As a result of various kinds of situational changes, the order created between an individual and their environment is disturbed. And these changes can be a small or very significant. However, any change in the structure or the interaction with the environment so far is associated with a feeling of fear.

So, fear of disintegration can become very difficult to observe. The strength of such anxiety depends, among other things, on whether the change is probable or not. Life is

characterized by changeability and each system must take into account that various changes will still take place in it and in its relationship with the environment. So, these changes largely depend on the human being. Disintegrative anxiety protects a person against constant changes that life brings.

But on the other hand also against the lack of it, because the lack of any change after some time leads to the growing anxiety which is explained by the fact that people living a lifestyle based on routines have a disintegration fear greater than those who live a life full of changes and surprises. Now, according to W. Napora, a great psychologist, in psychology, stage fright is a particular type of anxiety accompanying public performances. He defines stage fright as a compound phenomenon consisting of worry and emotion. Worry is related to the doubt about the quality of the performance and the fear of the judgment of the public.

Emotion is the perception of our own somatic state which could be exaggerated and can lead to increase concern about ourselves. Now in his work, he underlines that stage fright relates to the anxiety which can be understood in two categories- as a state and as a feature. Anxiety understood as a feature is a result of previous experiences learned usually in childhood and it is not a proportion reaction to the situation which is not dangerous to one's life. Anxiety as seen as one's state of mind is characterized by the possibility of the change. The levels of fear can fluctuate because of the influence of the stressors.

So, stage fright is a dynamic psychological process which is connected to the public performances when the performer expects to be judged by the public. During the process, the interaction between emotional and the cognitive components occur which is caused by the uncertainty of the reception and evaluation of the performance and/or the expectation for negative reception and evaluation. The process is usually related to the negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, shame, disappointment, sadness, and anger. So, stage fright is a complex process accompanying performances. Mostly as a performer, you should know about it and as I said that the best thing is to self-introspect.

You know yourself better. Mostly the negative impact of anxiety associated with the performance can be perceptible. However, the levels of anxiety are related to the past experiences and personal features of the performer. The psychological symptoms of negative impact are very similar to panic attack, but A stage fright is not a form of panic attack. This is what the psychologists say.

Performance anxiety can cause changes in cognitive somatic state, psychological arousal, and behavior. The fear is mostly related to the worry of being judged or being

judged in the future by the audience, as a form of social fear with or without being aware of it just by himself herself, as a form of moral fear and ambitions of the performer, and also by the fear of disintegration which is related to the process of entering the role of a performer on the stage. Now, Kierkegaard, I mentioned this name earlier also, a great philosopher who understood anxiety as the feeling of not having a fixed sense of self. As completely free beings we have the constant freedom of choice, but the fact that these choices may be really important give us anxiety. "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom," quoted Kierkegaard.

According to Heidegger, one would be inauthentic if he could exist by only one fixed sense of self. Spinelli in his introduction to the book titled, *Phenomenological Psychology* that came out in 1989, explains that there is an unlimited number of possible future selves and if we are open to them, "this is authentic but anxiety-provoking." In the impossible case when one attempts to leave avoiding the anxiety by living an inauthentic life, the dread will appear eventually. The inauthentic life also restricts the person's potential because this is an avoidance of becoming a different person in the future. Lawrence also quotes in *A Relational Perspective*- this book came out in 2001- suggesting that performance anxiety may be an opportunity for a new emergent self, and this could be welcomed instead of fear.

See we are discussing that what is stage fright. In introduction to countering stage fright, therefore, it is very important to know about the very character of this fear- what kind of fear? Only then we could be able to address it. So, self-introspection, explanation of this fear, is very important. The effects of stage fright are mostly noticeable during the performance, but they might occur before and after. If one can understand stage fright as a worry and emotion-kind of a stress, one can begin to sort out the problems quite easily into two types of categories.

One is related to the performance and the stage, the other is related to the mental health and well-being of a performer. Well, I find that the first category of problems are easier to solve by practicing the part in detail. Being ready and mentally aware of emerging into a role while entering the stage and being aware of one's fear about the judgments of listeners. The second category of problem is related to self evaluation and I find it much more complicated and related directly with the psychology. Well, there is no fixed rules to avoid stage fear.

You must keep this in your mind. But some of the features, as measures, we can apply to reduce control stage fright. Therefore, if my sense of achievement has a direct impact on my assessment of the reality which is a deciding factor for the levels of my or anyone's performance anxiety, I would have to look for a method on how to change my sense of

achievement or sense of quality life in order to have a significant influence on my self evaluation. I would have to look into my own trauma issues and the causes of my perception of my achievement and quality of life, and that deserves help of a specialist. Well, this is all about the anxiety performance and stage fear.

I repeatedly say that you all have to try to understand your mental condition, your physical condition, your surrounding factors. Only then you could be able to address this problem you are suffering from. You are the best judge, you are the best person to know about this kind of problem. And there are several exercises to control this kind of nervousness. How to help yourself-relaxing, controlling your breathing, that depends on you.

Relaxation and breathing techniques are invaluable when trying to calm your nerves, but for that you need to know your fear. When we are nervous we often take shallow breaths and this leads to added anxiety. So, slowing down our breathing and learning to relax are invaluable. Breathing is a very important factor in overcoming the nervousness caused by the increase of adrenaline. Excess adrenaline makes us breathe shallow, that is in the top part of our body that is lungs, and too rapidly.

So, this fear of a stage performance- public speaking, you know, affects several. And according to one estimate 75 percent of people suffer from various forms of this phobia, anxiety, fear and 10 percent of people are genuinely terrified. So, the fear of this public speaking is the number one phobia throughout the world, and more common than the fear of anything else- height, water, or anything else. We know the power of generosity to give us a sense of fulfillment, purpose, meaning. Generosity is just powerful in speaking, it turns a nerve raking and even painful experience into one of giving and helping others.

A generous speaker is calmer, more relaxed and most important, more effective at reaching the audience and making the desired impact. That is why you should know the level of your anxiety. You assess yourself and you discuss openly with others. And as I said, generosity is one of the most important factors while speaking in public. See, my students use this technique because I share with them more than 3 consecutive times.

They almost always report a decrease in speaking anxiety and also note that the most important people to look at are those who are at the far edges of the room. These are the people who are already at a disadvantage. So, by being extra generous to those at the edges of the room, you bring everyone in. So, we know the power of generosity we know the power of, you know, being cool and calm.

Well, this is hard. We are accustomed to scanning the room. Making direct eye contact

can feel uncomfortable at first Yet as you practice it more, it will actually make you less nervous. It is far easier and more effective to have a series of one-on-one conversation than it is to speak to everyone at once. This is also advisable that you reach the room before the time. And you can talk to some of the audience.

That can also make you normal, quite familiar with everyone. So, in reality each person in the room or among the audience, they are listening to you as an individual. And so, the best way to connect to your audience is by speaking to them as individuals. And the question is how? By making sustained eye contact with one person per thought and each thought is about one full clause. By focusing at one person at a time, you make each person in the room feel like you are talking just to them.

Means, a kind of rapport you are developing. And when this rapport, connectivity, you could develop. The nervousness level will go down. So, while you are speaking, making eye contact is very very important. The escapist quality do not develop this.

That is why I said that generosity, the generous quality, is very important to counter the stage fright. And one of the biggest mistakes we make is speaking to people as a group. No. Even as a teacher we look at individual student. We try to connect ourselves with the student.

So, you need to look into this. Right before you speak, refocus your brain. You are the most nervous right before you present or you speak. And this is the moment where your brain is telling you "everyone is judging me, what if I fail?? And it is exactly at this moment that you can refocus your brain. Remind yourself that you are here to help your audience, to enhance the knowledge of your audience, because you are supposed to give some information. Be firm with your brain and tell yourself- "this presentation is not about me, it is about helping my audience."

Over time, usually between 4 and 6 presentations, your brain will begin to get it and you will become less nervous. So, when you are preparing, think about your audience. Always keep in mind your audience. When we start preparing for a presentation, the mistake we all make is starting with the topic. This immediately gets us inside the details and makes it harder to break down the wall between us and others.

So, instead start with the audience. Before diving into the information, ask yourself- who will be in the room? Why are they there? What do they need? Be specific in your answer, identify the audience's needs- both spoken and unspoken, and craft a message that speaks directly to those needs. No doubt that presentation, public presentation or a stage presentation, is a formal activity. But then you need to be a little bit informal to make

yourself connect with the audience. The hardest time is speaking in public, because their brain is telling them now is not the time to give.

It is time to run. But it is absolutely possible to become a generous speaker and for that you need to practice some steps. Studies have shown that an increase in generosity leads to a decrease in amygdala activity in the brain. Showing kindness and generosity to others has been shown to activate the vagal nerves which has the power to calm the fight or the flight response. So, when we are kind to others, we feel calmer and less stress, because you are not in a battlefield. You are not supposed to fight with the audience, they are all your friends.

This is the generosity activity. The same principle applies in public speaking. When we approach speaking with a spirit of generosity, we counteract the sensation of being under attack and start to feel less nervous. And then finally, fortunately, there is a solution and this is generosity, where calming the amygdala, helping the audience. Well with these words I am going to wrap up the discussion for today. In the upcoming lectures you will come to know different kinds of phobias, you know types of phobias, reason to develop, then genetic causes- how genetic stands for such factors to develop this nervousness and on top of all, how to counter this.

So, with this I conclude and I hope to see you in rest of my lectures. Thank you very much.