

When I was very young, I had a moment that changed the way I would act for many years to come. I was deathly afraid of attention of any kind, change, trying new things, or getting rid of old ones. New activities, or changes with my personal self, came from being forced into. In my current stage of life, it has benefited me drastically, for I have gotten over many of the feelings or have learned to use current ones to my advantage. However, during my youth I experienced many hardships, because I preferred to stay in a given situation than risk getting any sort of new criticism, positive or negative.

I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. We had an assembly sometime after school. I can't remember exactly what it was about, but I do know it was an awards ceremony of some sorts. I saw some of my friends in line, and I proceeded to talk to them about whatever was important to a 6 year old kid at the time. Before I knew it, I was at the front of the line, and the announcer asked me to come forward. Not knowing what was happening, I followed her instructions and stepped up to the stage. She asked me my name, and with my fear of knowing I wasn't supposed to be up there, I stated, "I'm not here to win anything, I'm just here to watch". I laugh as I'm typing this, however my reaction at that time was very different. The entire crowd, as if bright neon signs above my head lit up with the words LAUGH NOW, broke down with laughter, my peers and their parents alike. I hung my head low to cover my face and attempt to remove myself from the situation as best as I could, but that only seemed to fuel on the humor of the situation for the older humans in the crowd, including my mother. The embarrassment from the situation was traumatizing to my child self. I couldn't from that point on, step into the spotlight and let myself be known for mistakes I might have made, or praised for accomplishments I have done, even from my family. This fear of thinking of what people *might* be thinking of me developed

instantly, and very deep seated. I wanted nothing more than to remain a shadow behind the crowd.

Social phobia is a disorder “characterized by a strong and persistent fear of social or performance situations in which the patient might feel embarrassment or humiliation” (Frey, 905). I actually postponed writing this paper because someone sat behind me at the coffee shop I do my work at, and I thought they would see what I was writing about. 89% of all cases of social phobia contain the following fears;

Being embarrassed or looking stupid are among my worst fears

Fear of embarrassment causes me to avoid doing things or speaking to people

I avoid activities in which I am the center of attention

*(Frey, 909)*

I find all to be true, except for speaking to people on a small group or personal level. What I don't do so well is talking to groups of people that I do not know. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, I stood in front of my english class and had to give an oral presentation. I practiced for it and wrote down exactly what I would need to say on a piece of paper, yet the moment I realized I was in the attention of the classroom, I froze. I forgot everything that I was going to do, and stuttered throughout, with many thoughts consisting of what to say and how dumb I must look. I became enveloped in this ‘fog’, I knew, from my perspective of what others might be thinking, I looked like a fool, only fueling the current epidemic in my mind. I would not have done this presentation if it were voluntary.

Why am I so wary and avoid situations where I feel I'm being judged, yet I can get used to hearing mortar fire going off with the intent to kill me, or walk into a prison house with over 170

inmates by myself, many of whom would want nothing more than “That guy killed a CO” added to their reputation? “*Stimulus generalization* occurs when a person experiences a fearful event and later develops a fear of similar events” (Exploring Psychology, 517). I never experienced a fearful situation associated with mortar fire, or getting into a fight with an inmate.

People with social phobia may “experience distress when... being the center of attention, or being watched while doing something” (Walsh). I can’t even dance in front of people without the feeling of everyone’s eyes on me. I’ve had girlfriends try to pull me out on the floor, only to have myself panic and not engage. It feels similar to an adrenaline rush, that fear and rush combined when you see a dangerous event is about to occur, similar to the moment before a fistfight. You get nauseas and can’t think clearly, all you know is that you want to avoid this situation. However, Frey writes that the disorder last through one’s life and that it diminishes over time, which I find is happening to me (905).

During my pre-combat training, there was a guy named (Friend), whom I loathed. Yet, he saw the way I reacted to attention of any sort, and started, unbeknown to him, exposure therapy.

“These therapies, in a variety of ways, try to change people’s reactions by repeatedly exposing them to stimuli that trigger unwanted reactions (Exploring Psychology, 551). He called me out, used me as the butt of his jokes, and various other tactics. It actually drove me to the point of depression and the thought of suicide crossed my mind a few times. However, in the end, I ended up not caring. “With repeated exposure to what they normally avoid or escape (behaviors that get reinforced by reduced anxiety), people adapt” (Exploring Psychology, 551). I developed new thought processes and ways to look at things. I learned to laugh at myself. I developed thick skin. (Friend) and I are good friends now. I’ll be his best man in his upcoming wedding.

Not every outcome is bad. I had this fear of changing because I didn't want to be questioned about anything I was doing. I figured if I stayed constant the questions wouldn't come, nor the attention. I would be ignored. I stayed in orchestra because of this when I got shoved into it during the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Eventually I became the #1 ranked bass player in northern Nevada and 4<sup>th</sup> in all of the state. I go to coffee shops to do homework because I don't want to be that kid playing video games in public, so it forces me to show off this "man who gets shit done" persona, as I like to think of it.