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## A Fearless Woman: Case Study

The woman who is the subject of this paper is simply known as patient S. M. , in order to protect her identity. The peculiar characteristic of patient S. N. is that she is apparently fearless in front of any situation. The reason why she is unable to experience fear even when exposed to really frightening situations is that she suffers from a very rare genetic condition that caused the amygdalae on both sides of her brain to harden as a result of excessive calcium deposit on it. The region of S. M. 's brain that got damaged, the amygdalae, located in the temporal lobe, is of vital importance when it comes to experiencing fear. It allows the brain to elaborate external visual and auditory stimuli and to connect them with the sensation of fright. However, the amygdalae also regulates other important emotions, such as anxiety and aggression, but its role has not been fully understood so far.

Many studies have been conducted on S. M. in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of her psychological disorder and of her consequent behavior. Researchers have exposed her to different scary situations in which they thought a normal person would have experienced fear. She has been very close to snakes and tarantulas without displaying any sign of being frightened. She was asked to keep notes on a diary of all her emotions throughout the experiments and when she reported them none of them was similar to fear. Surprisingly, she reported feeling boredom or even happiness in some of the scariest situations. The studies also demonstrated that under certain circumstances S. M. is able to feel upset or angry in respect to the danger, but still cannot experience fear. She went through very difficult situations in her life, like being held at a knifepoint and a gunpoint, in part for the fact that she lives in a disreputable neighborhood and in part because her lack of fear often brings her about involving herself in dangerous situations, but she says that she has never been afraid.

Nevertheless, she is completely aware of her disorder and of the dangers that surround her, the strange fact is that she is unable to elaborate a psychological response to the external stimuli. Therefore, even if she acknowledges that a certain situation is dangerous for her her body does not react, leaving her at the mercy of the danger. In spite of the fact that patient S. M. is one of the few people to display this rare disorder, known as Urbach-Wiethe disease, her life is not very different from the one of normal people. She had been married in the past but at the moment she is a proud single mother of three children, all of which confessed that they do not remember a single occasion in which they saw their mother being scared of something.

Living in a slum surely does not help her anyway, because she is always exposed to different kind of dangers and her poor capacity of discerning potentially incoming threatening complicates things even more. As for instance, when she was held at a knifepoint in a park nearby her house she proved no fear, and the following day she came back to the same spot as nothing ever happened. Apart for these little inconveniences, she still conducts a life that can be considered fairly normal.