

Passive Stance, Neutral Stance, De-escalation Stance, The Fence
What Does Science Have To Say About Their Intended Purpose

This brief article is spawned from a news clip located at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/science/2004-11-15-fear_x.htm

which was brought to my attention by a poster by the name of Rab on Richard Dimitir's Sانشido Forum located at:

<http://sانشido.savi.ca/viewtopic.php?t=2148>

Most of us who instruct in the area of combatives/RBSD teach that during the pre-contact phase, if through awareness you pick up a threat and cannot evade or escape and are confronted, to adopt a non-threatening posture, where appropriate and reasonable to do so (Passive Stance, Neutral Stance, De-escalation Stance, The Fence). Although known by many different names, this pre-contact stance is designed to:

- Be non-threatening
- Set a boundary
- Be a platform to non-telegraphically launch a first strike if required

Although intuitively and empirically most of us believed that these stances had a desired effect on our identified threat, science is now beginning to show us that “whole-body” expressions can and do have either a calming or activation effect on those parts of the brain that trigger the “FEAR” response which increases activation in the motor areas thus priming one to action.

As many of you know, I am an instructor that strongly believes in both scientific and empirical research in all areas of combatives, due to the fact that teaching/training based upon such research, helps one base their actions from a strong foundation rather than through conjecture, supposition, or tradition.

After reading the above noted news clip, I set out to find the actual scientific paper that was written by Gelder, Snyder, Greve, Gerard, and Hadjikhani due to the fact that the press do have a habit of skewing information in their articles. The full paper can be located at:

http://www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/0407042101v1?hits=10&FIRSTINDEX=0&FULLTEXT=gelder&SEARCHID=1100982971623_2819&gca=pnas%3B0407042101v1&gca=pnas%3B99%2F6%2F4121&

After reading the entire research paper, I was truly inspired by the fact that adopting a passive stance confirms that empirically we were correct in assuming that a “neutral” body stance that was “CONGRUNET” with neutral communication skills do evoke considerably less condition specific activity in areas of the brain (amygdala) that are related to action representation. In other words, a good passive stance with good congruent passive language likely will not kick start ones sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight/hypervigilance). Why is this important ??????, because if and when I do decide to strike first from this stance, reaction time from my threat will be increased !!!!!!! Again, although this may seem obvious to some or even common sense to others, researchers “MAY” have now confirmed this scientifically. To quote the authors:

“ Our results indicate that observing fearful body expressions produces increased activity in brain areas narrowly associated with emotional processes and that this emotion related activity occurs together with activation of areas linked with

representation of action and movement. The mechanism of fear contagion hereby suggested may automatically prepare the brain for action.”

To those in this field who say that a passive stance during the pre-contact phase will have no affect on a potential threat, I say the science is showing otherwise !!!!!

One has to remember however, that if body language and communication are not CONGRUENT with one another, especially when attempting to de-escalate a possible physical encounter, you will likely begin to decrease your threat’s reaction time. This is why “realistic” scenario based training (which should be video taped and debriefed with students) needs to also concentrate on the pre-contact phase that is soooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo very very important in combatives/RBSD training, but yet is overlooked or paid lip service by many.

Darren