



Learn secrets of the mind and forever solve the problems of negative emotions, bad behaviors, disempowering thoughts and dysfunctional relationships.

PUNK PSYCHOLOGY

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CHAPTER 7
**UNIVERSAL
TRAUMA
SYNDROME**

In an earlier chapter I introduced new ideas about *delayed* post-traumatic stress disorder and also what is commonly known as complex trauma syndrome. I hinted that we all suffer from something of the kind and, in fact, in Hypnoetics™ (and the mother subject of Supernoetics®) we recognize the condition of Universal Trauma Syndrome, or UTS. Universal because it's everywhere; no-one is exempt.

Modern psychologists are studying such effects for all they are worth. But they work almost exclusively with sick or troubled people, with stories of abuse, addiction, phobias and insanity. They understandably lose sight of the fact that the same mechanisms are at work in us all.

Researches have shown that psychic trauma everywhere abounds, is held within us, is capable of causing immense damage to emotional and physical health, and is generally badly understood and not well dealt with. In other words, *we all suffer from stress* but in varying degrees.

Hidden emotional charge from psychic events of the past is real, buried (sometimes very deeply) and extremely damaging.

THE HARDY PERSONALITY

The thing is, each of us has different tolerance to stress and trauma events. What is miserable adversity to one may be a stimulating "challenge" for another. The same setback, such as a divorce or bankruptcy will have different effects on each individual, according to how well they cope. This is partly a function of concomitant load factors, as explained above. But also in part a measure of each person's inner resistance or vitality.

In other words stress is not an event, as such, but *how you perceive that event*.

One can conceive, as Chicago psychologist Suzanne Kobasa does, of the "hardy personality". She came up with this theory while studying stressed executives and noticed that while half fell ill to stress-related diseases, the other half remained fit and cheerful.

She identified the main characteristics of the survivors by three "C"s:

- Commitment - to themselves, their family and their job
- Control - being able to make changes; not being helpless

- Challenge - the determination that life's switches and tumbles were part of the thrill of being alive.

Elsewhere in Supernoetics™ we talk about the life effects scale (FX plot) and it is our view that those riding high on the curve, who are filled with zest, happiness and vitality, are immeasurably more able to cope with disaster than those who are running low on life energy. True, a big setback will bring even the hardest type downwards on the graph. But the whole point is the higher you start out, the more reserve you have; the further it is to hit rock bottom.

It's a kind of safety margin between you and failure or death.

The fact is that buried mental traumas don't just vanish. They can be ignored, worked around or denied, but they don't go away. Years of research into cases, who have been worked up with emotional freedom technique, Sedona, counseling, etc. and yet still, *when you ask the right question in the right way*, dissolve into a morass of tears... it was not eradicated. There was only the pretense of a solution. The person is still oppressed by their past traumas.

It affects everyone; hence our term: universal trauma syndrome or UTS. Let's dig a little deeper, starting with the concept of "stress". It's a word we all use, yet with little real understanding of what it means, beyond feeling unpleasant.

Stress is one of the commonest reasons for consulting a doctor, second only to coughs and colds. Ironically, the medical profession has little to offer, beyond tranquillizing drugs and bland advice.

Yet stress is something uniquely personal, which we alone are really able to control for ourselves. First it is necessary to understand what stress is and then, if you cannot altogether remove it, you need strategies for counterbalancing its dangerous effects. Because make no mistake, stress *in its fullest sense* is the world's number one killer.

What we know today is that stress, or shall we broaden it to the term psychic trauma, will visit into your physical body.

WHAT IS STRESS?

So what is stress? Fundamentally, it is any threat or counter-pressure on your survival; in other words anything which limits or opposes your life potential.

This can mean fear of losing a loved one, money worries or anxiety when flying. Stress truly has many faces.

In biological terms, this can be compared to the classic “fight or flight” situation. There is a threat and certain over-drive mechanisms are brought into play, ready for the encounter. Most noteworthy is the familiar adrenalin reaction, which increases heart rate and blood pressure. But there are many other changes that the body makes in preparation for extreme effort, such as mobilization of steroid hormones, increased perspiration, faster breathing, the liver breaks down fats for energy, digestion stops and saliva dries up. While transient, there is little problem.

But when the tension is continued too long, it can become damaging to have the body continue in this hyper-alert condition.

In this event, numerous symptoms develop, such as depression or anxiety, aches and pains, loss of appetite and insomnia. The individual is likely to become extremely irritable and difficult to live with. This deterioration in interpersonal levels is one of the saddest and most damaging aspects of our modern stressful way of life.

Unhappiness and the downgrading of love and affection is a tremendous price to pay for living in the fast lane or keeping up with the metaphorical Joneses.

OTHER FORMS OF STRESS

It is not widely understood that there are many forms of stress, over and above the classic mental pressures such as money worries, failed relationships and bereavements.

Dysfunctional sleep patterns stress the body. So does poor diet, chemical pollution and working too hard. Inadequate nutrition is one of the biggest causes of biological stress. Some foods are worse than others and we can introduce the term “stressor foods”.

Viral and other illnesses are also stresses on the body, though it must be remembered that it becomes a circular jeopardy, because stress causes illness, which causes more stress, and so on.

There are many other less obvious alarms, such as the constant background threat of nuclear annihilation or ecological nemesis and the accelerating pace

of history. We cannot escape these fears, whether consciously or subconsciously. Those who appear not to care are merely suppressing the danger within and that in many ways is even more dangerous than confronting it.

Finally, if that were not enough, we have technological advances that are now so complex and rapid there is a real danger of physical meaning to the metaphorical term “mind-blowing”.

OVERLOAD

What all this adds up to is the increasing likelihood of overload. Our biological defence systems can cope admirably well, *but there is a limit*. We are just expecting too much of our biological machines, which after all take millions of years to evolve new stratagems and forms.

When there is just too much to keep abreast with, we enter the state of overload and things start to go wrong, a little at first but then with rapidly advancing deterioration in our physical condition. What begins as just a few attacks of indigestion can soon become a stomach ulcer, then cancer and then death, all within a few years of the first signals.

Important: What is not appreciated is that by the time symptoms begin to appear it is *too late*. The very emergence of signs of damage (which is what symptoms are), means that the defence mechanisms have begun to break down. *They can no longer protect you.*

By the time you *feel* ill, your body has probably been suffering damage for many years. The body has cleverly compensated. But when this protection runs out, like bad spending, your account is bankrupt and you are in dead trouble.

The onset of illness is often a complex process. The causes can appear misleading to the careless or ignorant observer. You may have been having a bad diet for many years, too much alcohol, lack of sleep and lack of restorative exercise. Then someone dies and you fall ill. “Ah, stress related due to bereavement”, someone says.

But the bereavement may simply, as in this case, be the last straw. There were many other hidden factors at work and the loss of a loved one was simply the trigger factor. Given a good diet, exercise and even a little self-care, this individual would not have fallen ill, merely grieved a little and then moved on.

It is *wrong* to blame just one factor when illness manifests. It is always a summation of complex interactions, each of which contributes something to the damage. I call this a cascade effect.

THE SIGNS OF OVERLOAD

Factually, the symptoms of too much stress are almost infinite. There are few specific symptoms. Generally, what the individual experiences is symptoms related to what we call “end-organ failure”. When overload has gone onto to breaking point, the weakest part of the body will snap first. This is where the earliest symptoms appear.

If the digestive system is weakest, there will be indigestion and other disturbance, maybe ulcer, colitis and eventually bowel cancer. If the circulation is weakest, there will be blood pressure or heart attack. Symptoms referred to the lungs include asthma, cough or shortness of breath. Endocrine gland breakdown can cause diabetes, thyroid problems, adrenal stress and so on.

When the brain is affected, symptoms can be very diverse because this is where all our experiences meet. Apart from the obvious symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, there can be many strange subjective feelings (subjective means only the person in question feels them), like “seeing myself in the distance, down a long tunnel,” or “like ice cold water running down my back and legs”.

None of these descriptions will sound familiar to the doctor and therefore the patient is likely to be dismissed as a crank, or worse!

Finally, of course, women have their own troubles and PMT (PMS) or the monthly blues are just one example of what happens when the system starts to malfunction.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

One of the problems in studying stress is to determine its onset. What can seem a mildly stimulating and even entertaining challenge to one person can seem like the end of the world to another who cannot cope sufficiently and collapses under the strain.

In other words stress is very subjective. Indeed, the overload concept will tell us right away that what is stress on one occasion when the load is high may not cause any reaction another time, when the other load factors are eliminated.

Probably the most famous analysis of the health consequences of stress is the so-called Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H Rahe of the University of Washington School of Medicine interviewed over 5,000 cases and showed that the more stress you experienced, the more likely it was that you would suffer some kind of health breakdown in the subsequent 2 years.

They went further and were able to produce a league table of disaster, which rated each life event according to severity and likeliness of ill-health. The top 3 events concern break up of longstanding relationships, whether by death or divorce and this will come as no surprise to those who have had to endure such suffering. Also appearing are marriage, change of job, jail term, pregnancy and large mortgage. It is interesting to note that even what are supposed to be pleasing life events, nevertheless carry their stress toll (marriage, birth and getting a raise).

THE NEW RATING ON THE HOLMES AND RAHE SCALE

A new scale of rankings were drawn up in 1997 by psychiatrists from the Veterans Affairs Medical Centre in Reno, Nevada, based on a study of 427 volunteers who were asked to assess 87 life events.

The study was published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* and reported by Hospital Doctor. Women scored 86 of the 87 events as more stressful men. But, so the explanation goes, it is not women who are over-reacting but men who are under-reacting!

It was reckoned that stress, overall, has increased by 45% in the 40-year period since Holmes and Rahe carried out the first study.

Unmarried people gave higher scores across the range of events. It suggests that being married or attached is a far safer way to face life's trials and that you will live longer and be more healthy if you are married. This has been shown before to be a true medical fact.

The old and new scales are as follows:

1997.

1. Death of spouse
2. Divorce
3. Death of close family member
4. Marital separation
5. Fired from work
6. Major illness or injury
7. Jail term
8. Death of close friend
9. Pregnancy
10. Major business readjustment
11. Loan repayment demand
12. Gain new family member
13. Marital reconciliation
14. Change in health of family member
15. Change in financial state

1977.

1. Death of spouse
2. Death of close family member
3. Fired from work
4. Divorce

5. Pregnancy
6. Jail term
7. Loan repayment demand
8. Marital separation
9. Change in health of family member
10. Marriage
11. Retirement
12. Sexual difficulties
13. Change in financial state
14. Gain new family member
15. Death of close friend

A BRILLIANT DEFINITION OF STRESS

Exclusively for Punk Psychology™, I have developed a masterful and unique definition of stress: *stress is the difference between what you have got and what you wanted!*

Think about this. The further apart the two scenarios are, the most you need to change to get to where you want to be; the more mental tension; the bigger the disappointment if you fail.

So a man who wants to be rich and is stony broke is going to feel worse about it than a happy-go-lucky guy who never worries about money! A woman who wanted to marry a nice, loving, safe man is going to feel far worse if she finds she has married a brute than she would if her husband was merely incompetent.

Stress is measured by the size of the gap. If what you have got is exactly what you wanted, then there is no stress at all. Do you see?

This does not invalidate or overwrite any other workable definition of stress. It's brilliant in that it works alongside any other model.

So - WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are a number of ways to enter the field of stress reduction. It is a question of reducing the overload and it can be tackled at several points.

You may be going through a bankruptcy or divorce. These are extremely difficult times and it is somewhat naive to suggest you act in a laid back fashion. More sensible would be to deal with the things that you *can* control, such as leisure, diet and a reduced workload. Try to ease the other aspects of your life until the main aggravation is ended.

The general principle is to improve things along several fronts at once, rather than picking a fad and being fanatical about that one aspect of health. It is little use taking up daily jogging to improve your health, for example, if you make no effort to change your diet or establish more control over your work environment. You are unlikely to live longer. Indeed you may well be one of the unlucky few who drop dead of worry and work overload while on a jogging and fitness program!

Most important of all - and this is the doctor talking to you - is *love*. You need to be anchored by a loving and nourishing relationship through these stressful times. If someone is standing beside you, sharing the knocks (and the triumphs too!), there is no doubt that you will ride over disaster with fewer wounds and hurt.

This cuts both ways: you may be going through a very bad time, coping with immense stress. *Under no circumstances take it out on your lover or family*. It is tempting to do so but this is the high road to a wrecked home. You need them as surely as they need you. If times are tough *double your output of love*. Others around you will respond as surely as if you had infected them with a plague!

The final answer to stress - all stress, all categories and all degrees - is *love*.

L-O-V-E.

And Hypnoetics™ piloting, of course! OK, upwards and onwards...

PUNK POINTS:

- There is no universal definition of stress; it means different things to different people. But there is no question that *what the individual perceives as stress is damaging, both mentally and physically* to him or her.
- Holmes and Rahe gave a quantified tabulation of different stresses in a person's life. They found even supposedly-pleasant events, like getting married or getting a raise, could be stressful.
- As well as classic mental pressures such as money worries, failed relationships and bereavements, stress can also come from lack of sleep, poor diet, chemical pollution, a viral illness, working too hard and wrong foods.
- In Hypnoetics™ we have developed a masterful and unique definition of stress: *stress is the difference between what you have got and what you wanted!*