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Defending Against Attack



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Synonyms

[Combat](#); [Fighting](#); [Martial arts](#); [Personal protection](#); [Self-defense](#); [Situational awareness](#)

Definition

Biomechanical and psycho-physiological defensive response by the human body to a close quarters physical attack.

Introduction

All attacks and assaults on human beings are dangerous; however, the most dangerous attack is one a person doesn't see coming. Because predators stalk their prey, they often decide where, how, and when they will engage their target (Meadows 2007). This creates a dynamic where a victim is surprised by sudden violence given a lack of awareness of the attack and the subsequent and overwhelming psychological, emotional, and physical trauma during the critical incident. A blitz-style or ambush-style attack is one without

a person's consent and is a common method used by nearly all offenders while they prey on a victim's perceived vulnerabilities (DeBecker 1997). An attack will create a fight or flight response as well as a state of inertia (freeze) depending on a victim's awareness and self-defense skills. Successfully navigating the best defense to sudden, interpersonal human aggression requires an examination of psycho-physiological and biomechanical processes of a victim during times of critical stress.

Evolution of Self-defense

For many years, much debate has centered on the best models for achieving proficiency in armed and unarmed human conflicts. With a lack of similar and interchangeable defensive tactics and firearm programs for civilians, non-universal laws, and an ever-increasing field of commercial use of force systems, discerning the best defense against an attack by a violent offender is difficult (Kinnaird 2014).

Most unarmed self-defense techniques learned today have a historical lineage through war and military engagements over thousands of years (Grossman 2008). From our prehistoric ancestors to soldiers of the early twentieth century, fighting tools and tactics were primitive and limited. Since the 1950s, however, martial arts techniques such as kung fu, karate, tae kwon do, jiu-jitsu, and aikido had gained significant momentum as

staples in self-defense programming all over the world (Kinnaird 2014). Originating mostly from Asia and taught to those who lived or served in the war theaters of that region, the ability to fight largely with close-quarters orientations such as punches, kicks, and grappling techniques became popular in both sport and street combat (Siddle 1995).

From karate and kickboxing tournaments, law enforcement and military recruit academies to the lone vigilante on television and films who have made them popular, hand-to-hand fighting skills have taken on various forms over the years. Most recently, mixed martial arts techniques demonstrated in television and pay-per-view events such as the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* have been more narrowly transformed for close-quarters engagements and are widely renowned in military, law enforcement, and self-defense communities throughout the world (Kinnaird 2014).

According to research conducted by pioneers in contemporary personal protection, survival through effective self-defense has transitioned through yet another iteration. Blauer (2006) and Siddle (1995) explained that while traditional martial arts are great for fitness, discipline, focus, meditation, respect, and other valuable outlets, they do not always prepare a person for real street violence. Dogmatic self-defense examines mostly weapons and technique-based training: firearms, non-lethal devices, pressure points, wrist grabs, holds, and escapes (Miller 2011). If weapons are not available, a person is forced to use their body and fight in close quarters when they are attacked suddenly. While pain compliance techniques, for example, are effective, they are only effective in certain situations and circumstances (Blauer 2006).

Through studies of crimes against people, historical research into the functionality of warfare & combat, and along with new research that deconstructs the anatomy of a real attack, experts have made scientific correlations that highlight the validity and reliability of various self-defense systems. In doing so, a holistic model that accounts for behaviors related to fear and performance enhancement creates awareness in how a person feels when threatened or attacked (Artwohl and

Christensen 1997; Blauer 2006; Grossman 1996; Murray 2004; Siddle 1995).

Behavioral Defense

Emotional and psychological arousal comprises the first component of holistic self-defense. A psychomotor skill is generally defined as a body movement resulting from mental processes (Siddle 1995). Blauer (2006) explained that mental arousal is the first attack and therefore the mind navigates the body. In a stimulus-response environment, how you think determines how you feel and how you think and feel affects what you *do*. Because humans are attacked psychologically and emotionally before they are ever attacked physically, awareness through visualization and expectation are positive behavioral strategies for defense against the attack (Blauer 2006). This includes good confidence by looking people in the eye, being assertive through choice speech, rehearsing a violent attack ahead of time, and expecting to successfully defend yourself from it.

Using words or verbal defuses help to de-escalate a hostile situation (Meadows 2007). Because attackers will often talk and physically posture, all potential attacks can be observed by understanding the feelings behind the words and observing the postures that go with it. By offering compliant words to the aggressor or *redirecting* any words the attacker, the self-defense comes from an interruption in thinking patterns and provides time to escape or time to think of another strategy (Blauer 2006).

DeBecker (1997) explained that fear management is another tool for increased awareness and modern personal protection. Will, the power of indignation, tenacity, and primal instincts are natural and organic responses to survival that do not include rote memory and complicated training. Furthermore, observing the behavior and pre-contact cues of an aggressor will help establish an intuitive radar that can be accessed immediately and into the future. This “gut instinct” is born out of continuous observance of stimuli and responses to stimuli and is the quickest and most accurate way for your brain and body to sense

trouble. This sensation is derived from a total accumulation of past experience, knowledge, and what a person can anticipate happening and then use it to inform a choice under stress (DeBecker 1997).

Grossman (1996) explained that because interpersonal human aggression is a primary human phobia, the lack of awareness and acceptance of predatory and attacking behavior (denial) can create significant barriers to mental processing and slow the scenario down in a negative way. Artwohl and Christensen (1997) offered that organic fear happens when a person sees someone who is angry, when they aggressively encroach personal space, or when they make threats or use vulgar or abusive language. These translate into physical responses that lead to tactical choices of escape (flight) or defense (fight).

Physical Defense

Physiological arousal is the last component of understanding the biomechanics of confrontation and utilizing holistic self-defense strategies. When attacked in close-quarters, the situation is tense, evolving, and uncertain. Because the situation is out of control, researchers agree that the behavioral aspects of organic fear and awareness through training and experience will increase or decrease the physiological arousal in both perceiving the attack and using effective strategies to survive it (Blauer 2006).

Key points about how the body responds to stress from psychological and emotional precursors have been examined and reviewed through motor control and learning as core training rhetoric for the physiology of skill acquisition (Artwohl and Christensen 1997; Grossman 2008; Siddle 1995). This includes rudimentary skill classifications and taxonomies such as fine, complex, and gross motor skills. The body will have a neurophysiological response to fear and, even if managed well, fear and survival instincts will kick in. This includes the adrenal gland “fight or flight” response to stress such as automatic pilot, diminished sounds, tunnel vision, increased heart rate, increased blood flow, dissociation,

slow-motion time, memory loss, and short bursts of strength (Artwohl and Christensen 1997).

As stress during an attack increases, fine and complex motor skills decrease including dexterity and coordination (Siddle 1995). Retention of learned self-defense techniques that do not account for this psychomotor loss will not be palpable tools during a sudden, aggressive attack. When a stimulus such as a punch, grab, or shove is introduced quickly, it will by-pass the cognitive, muscle memory systems in the brain and will create a startle-flinch response. According to a research by Blauer (2006), the human body’s flinch to danger is a hard-wired, reliable, and protective bio-mechanic process. These survival behaviors work in concert with the body’s autonomic and somatic nervous systems whereby the limbic system of the brain takes over the forebrain and larger, cognitive processes.

During this close-quarters encounter, the body is left with gross motor functions and will instinctively shield the head and upper body with arms and hands while turning away from the danger simultaneously (Blauer 2006; Siddle 1995).

While all humans respond the same to being startled, their perception and awareness of danger (and subsequent fear management) is variable and both can compound the ability to defend and survive a close-quarters attack (DeBecker 1997). Therefore, the use of gross motor tactics such as slapping, pushing, shoving, biting, clawing, and the use of elbows and knees to strike the vulnerable areas of an attacker are now universally accepted and shaped into modern self-defense programming (Siddle 1995).

Conclusion

Defense against an attack requires a functional and realistic response for survival. Because the human body and mind are connected, a holistic self-defense program captures both. Rather than relying on spiritual or mystical foundations and primitive fighting models, contemporary defensive tactics programs are now field tested and modified for dangerous environments and legal redress based upon how the mind and body

respond to danger and violence. Effective self-defense is best examined through psychological and physical stressors on the body during a real or perceived attack. Because a critical event is often outside a person's control, new research on the psychophysiology of confrontation illustrates how organic fear and stress affect human responses to interpersonal human aggression and, ultimately, the best tactics for preparation and defense during a close-quarters fight.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Combating Predators](#)
- ▶ [Defending Against Predators](#)
- ▶ [Predators](#)
- ▶ [Self-defense](#)
- ▶ [Survival and Death](#)
- ▶ [Violence as Coercive Control](#)

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