DR. JANET TAYLOR AND JED DEARYBURY

THE COURAGEOUS CLASSROOM

CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN AND THRIVE

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First Edition

Dedicated to my mother Joan Neal Taylor, an educator and my first teacher.

—Dr. Janet Taylor

Dedicated to my mother Lynn, the most courageous person I know.

—Jed Dearybury

About the Authors

Dr. Janet Taylor is a community psychiatrist in Sarasota, Florida, working with individuals who are criminal justice involved and have mental illness. She also has a private practice. The practice of community mental health is extremely rewarding to Dr. Janet, because “being on the frontline with individuals and their families battling the emotional and economic impact of Mental Illness is where I can make a difference.” She attended the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, for undergraduate and medical school. An internship in internal medicine at the Miriam Hospital-Brown University followed. Her psychiatric residency was completed at New York Medical College-Westchester Medical Center. She received a Master of Public Health in Health Promotion/Disease Prevention from Columbia University. Her medical experience is also international. While living in Vancouver, British Columbia, she practiced Community Psychiatry at Greater Vancouver Mental Health. During that time, Dr. Janet developed an interest in life coaching and became a certified professional coach through the Coaches Training Institute. She is a frequently invited speaker on the subjects of minority health, self-care, stress management, parenting, and work-life balance. She is a frequent contributor to CBS “This Morning,” and NBC “The Today Show” and ABC “Good Morning America” on issues of motherhood, parenting, and mental health. Dr. Janet is also regularly featured on CNN and MSNBC. Dr. Janet is a frequent speaker on the impact of Racial Trauma and Racism, Antiracism, and Conscious Allyship.

Jed Dearybury began his education career in 2001. During his 13-year early-childhood classroom tenure, Jed received

numerous awards. He was featured in GQ Magazine as Male Leader of the Year, met President Obama as the South Carolina honoree of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching, and was named as a top five finalist for South Carolina Teacher of the Year because of his passion, love, and success in education. Since leaving the second-grade classroom in 2015, he has been leading professional development across the country, as well as training the next generation of educators through his work and teaching in higher education, teaching children's literature, creativity and play for early childhood, and fine arts in the elementary classroom. In August 2019, he started his own education consulting business, mrdearybury.com LLC, where he is the director of Creativity and Innovation. He published his first book, *The Playful Classroom: The Power of Play for All Ages*, co-written with Dr. Julie P. Jones, in June of 2020, thus adding author and illustrator to his list of educational credits. *Courageous Classroom* is his second book. His mission: Equip, Encourage, Empower the teaching profession using creativity, laughter, and hands-on fun!

Foreword

When student and teacher meet with a shared respect, magic happens. Mythical things happen. Over the past 20 years I have worked with urban youth through the telling, discussion, and analysis of mythological stories. We provide a safe space, a *temenos*, where youth feel comfortable being and becoming who they are meant to become. The goal is to have them become the hero/heroine in their own stories. Our process helps make real the idea that they will need heroic character traits to get through life; traits such as perseverance, humility, resourcefulness, and willingness to make necessary sacrifices for something larger than themselves. And, they will need courage to continue despite the odds not being in their favor.

Janet Taylor has been a champion of our methods, and of all teachers who seek to educate in ways that meet the needs of the youth, instead of the needs of adults who insist on sterile measurements. She observed our sessions, and she reported to her audience on what she witnessed. She lifted up our method of telling myth to the beat of a djembe drum, stopping at critical points in the myth, and asking the youth what resonates with them – no right or wrong answers. A key to our process is that as educators, we share intimate parts of our history, about times when we found ourselves facing dilemmas similar to those that the myth depicts, and similar to those that the youth face. As adults, we have found the courage to shed tears in front of our youth, and they in turn have found the courage to shed tears in front of us.

In myth the hero often cries, and as we tell our youth, “It is okay to cry.” As a man, I model that it is okay for boys to cry. We create an environment of trust and mutual respect.

It is beyond amazing what youth share in our circles. Part of the amazement is because we realize we have a symbiotic relationship. We know we are learning just as much from the students as they are from us. Another key aspect of our process is the importance of listening and keeping an open mind. It is this level of wonder that Janet and Jed are advocating with their book.

Dedicated teachers have a challenging and stressful job. Most are looking for methods that will bring success to student and teacher alike. I have personally held back tears watching some teachers and administrators take advantage of authority in the name of rigid policy that does not serve the students. When this happens, we lose another youth with vast potential. In myth, the hero/heroine never accomplishes their tasks alone. They always have some sort of assistance from a guide and mentor. They are given tools and advice to overcome obstacles before them. When education works best, teachers are allowed to serve this role in the lives of students. Students feel free to come to them with hopes, dreams, and fears. Teachers must uncover both the gifts and wounds of their students, often while having to revisit past fears of their own.

As adults, we often project our own fears and past experiences onto present situations. Adults who work with youth need tools that will allow us to look into the mirror of our own souls and heal our own wounds, prior to working with youth. It takes courage to be an educator. It takes patience. It takes a belief in oneself and a belief in the student. This book allows both the teacher and student to garner the courage to become the heroes/heroines in their own stories.

Kwame Scruggs, PhD
Founder and Director

Alchemy, Inc.

Introduction

There is no courage without fear.

What is fear? Fear is an emotional experience in reaction to a situation perceived as threatening, unsafe, or dangerous. Although it is often perceived as negative, fear is a response that has evolved to help us both survive and reproduce as a species. When we experience fear, we have three kinds of responses: behavioral, physiological, and emotional. The behavioral response might be to attack (fight), run away (flight), or immobilize ourselves (freeze). Physiological responses include elevated heart rate, perspiration, or a trembly voice. The emotional response typically includes feelings of anger or sadness. Freezing can include hiding or “shutting down” emotionally. Most of us know how we feel and can recall a time when we were very afraid. Many of us have recurrent fears or specific phobias, or even what we still may be afraid of or have a phobia about but why? What happens to the brain and our body when we hear a sound, see something that frightens us, smell a noxious agent, or are touched by something unexpected?

To understand how fear impacts our body, we first need to understand some basics of the brain. The brain has two different kinds of tasks that it must balance. On the one hand, it must keep our body running, making sure our metabolism is humming along. On the other hand, it must process information from our environment to make sure we are not under threat. The brain has an evolutionary drive to balance our metabolic functioning with information processing and fear responses (Woods and Khierbeck 2017). Since survival is a foundational evolutionary concern, the hypothalamus, responsible for fear-related

emotional behaviors in animals and humans, is one of the oldest structures, deeply located in the brain (Hasan et al. 2019). It is responsible for fear-related emotional behaviors in animals and humans. It has evolved over time as have newer structures like the amygdala and medial prefrontal cortex. The amygdala is a hub in the brain for the expression and processing of threat and fear. When it receives cues – it receives visual, olfactory, auditory, and gustatory – it sends output to the prefrontal motor cortex (decision-making, mindful self-regulation) and the brainstem for behavioral and physiological output (freezing, fight, or flight). In other words, it tells our whole body whether we need to freeze, fight, or flee.

Fear and its associated behaviors have developed over millions of years so that we as humans could get through the day by listening, using our other senses, and being aware that danger was close, using our brain to adapt to threatening, dangerous situations. To survive, fear acquisition or fear learning had to happen quickly. There were no do-overs when the prehistoric wooly mammoth had you in his clutches. After one exposure to danger, humans and animals can form long-lasting fear memories and have the capacity to predict danger (Schiller et al. 2008). Fear learning is “rapid and resistant to modification” (Schiller et al. 2008) with the realization that constantly returning to dangerous situations is not advantageous to survival. The ability to flexibly analyze and adjust behavior is critical in unpredictable, changing environments. We are no longer living side-by-side with prehistoric predators, but we still maintain these evolutionary adaptations that influence how we respond to our environment, like school classrooms and within the four walls of home.

Our brain can be conditioned to automatically fear something: if we know a particular predator wants to make us his lunch, it is in our best interest not to waste valuable

time and energy deciding whether we want to stick around and chat with him. However, in more nuanced circumstances – like our present-day world often presents – our brain can also update itself, leading to a concept known as fear safety. Thanks to research carried out in mice, scientists believe that we have a “courage switch” that can shift fear to courage: a mouse that would ordinarily freeze in response to a visual threat, can become bold, fiercely thumping its tail (Huberman 2018). A similar structure exists in humans.

Fear might be evolutionarily adaptive, but so too is courage.

Courage, the process of addressing your own fear to achieve a specific purpose, is not just something that can be learned, it is learning itself. Defined as “the act or experience of one that learns,” learning also means “the modification of a behavioral tendency by experience” (Merriam-Webster n.d.).

Fear is a learned association between at least two things that are meant to be adaptive for us in an effort for minimizing exposure to danger. Rather than having to constantly expend energy to relearn what is dangerous or safe, we preserve fear memories and fear learning. However, our brain has the capacity for fear extinction and fear reversal, which allows us to gain cognitive control over our fears. In other words, your brain wants to keep you safe but not afraid. You can use emotional awareness and self-regulation to calm yourself and unlearn fear, using breathing techniques and having a courageous mindset.

What is the difference between a classroom governed by fear and a courageous classroom? While a fearful classroom is focused on student ability, a courageous classroom prioritizes learning for and from the students who are valued for their potential. And what makes that

difference? The teacher. As noted psychologist, Carol Dweck writes, “Every student has something to teach me” (Dweck 2014/2015). The underlying principle of a courageous classroom is belief in the capacity for students and teachers to be courageous in their learning and teaching.

Dr. Janet's Story

This book is a collaboration between two professionals with different experiences with and viewpoints on education. I (Dr. Janet) am not a teacher but a psychiatrist who usually sees kids who are not progressing in school and/or who have mental health issues impacting their ability to focus, learn information, or get along with their peers. As they grapple with underlying trauma, I am motivated by a desire to assist them as they face their own reality. My voice in this book is evidence-based, providing the neuroscience of fear and courage while sharing my own personal stories of finding my own courage. As the mother of four daughters, I respect teachers who, while raising their own families, skillfully and selflessly taught mine.

Jed's Story

As Dr. Janet's co-author, I (Jed) bring my almost-two-decade-long experience as a teacher and a direct voice of my own trauma, in the manner of a *speaking wound*, “the trauma born by an Other that speaks to the wound of the healer” (Dutro and Bien 2014). I share raw accounts of the difficulties of many of my students to illustrate the challenging experiences of trauma and fear that students and teachers bring into the classroom. These stories are the heart and soul of this book. They are told in a personal narrative format. I am more of a story teller than a

researcher, so the tone of the book may feel a bit different when I chime in. The students I write about are the ones who above all need(ed) a culture of safety within their classroom walls. The retelling of their stories is multi-purpose. One, to let other teachers know they are not alone in the work. We all have students with lots of trauma that we must talk about so we can figure out how to help them best. Two, talking about the needs of our students helps us to identify the strategies we need for assisting and teaching them. Three, talking about the effects of their trauma on their learning helps us to see where our own education fell short in preparing us for this profession. As a point of caution here, some of the stories may create deep grief for you. You may cry, you may cuss. You may even get mad at me because I didn't handle the situation like I should have. I admit, I wish I could have a rerun with some of these students as I have learned more now than I knew then. Some of the stories may be triggers for you as you process and navigate the waters of your own childhood trauma. Lord knows I have had my fair share: sexually, physically, mentally abused by my father; being gay in the Bible Belt South; and attending a Southern Baptist college while being gay and enduring two years of conversion therapy so I'd “turn straight” and Jesus would love me. These are just a few of the details of my own traumatic past. They alone could be a whole book. I digress.

Through research and relationships, this book will answer the question of how teachers can thrive and learn in spaces where, at times, both parties may experience stress, distress, fear, and anxiety from both internal and external sources. There are moments when the work may read like a college lecture and others where a therapist is talking to a client on the couch in the consulting room. The hope is that we provide advice about how to harness our neurobiological understanding of fear, and help educators

and students realize how to push fear aside both inside and outside classrooms. We believe it will show you how to tap into your own potential for healthy psychological functioning and intellectual growth as an individual, and within your institutional culture, by learning how to establish and maintain Courageous Classrooms and promote a growth mindset. Fear and adversity can disrupt the environment of optimal learning. Classrooms and schools that promote a culture of safety, creativity, resilience, and mindfulness will serve as a needed intervention strategy for students and teachers.

Today's teachers are “in the arena,” the words that President Theodore Roosevelt used in his 1910 speech (Sweeney 2020, p. 32), stating:

> It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasm, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Our teachers have to make decisions every day in the face of fear, whether it's their own past history and experience of trauma or the events that emerge from within the classroom. As Sir Edmund Hillary stated, “Fear can help you extend what you believed your capacity was.” That happens when instead of acting out of fear, one acts from a

place of opportunity, a chance to stretch and learn while utilizing courage.

No one – outside immediate family – has greater impact on students than a teacher. Who doesn't remember the one teacher who pushed them, challenged them, held them accountable, or triggered a fierce and terrific feeling within their being, ready to be unleashed?

As a community psychiatrist, Dr. Janet is asked to assess and treat students who may have mental health issues. As an educator, I (Jed) frequently find myself being asked to do the job of a community psychiatrist – Janet's job – yet the professional training I have received to assess and treat students that have mental health issues is minimal at best. As you will read, instead, I draw on my own traumatic childhood experiences to help students who have experienced trauma. I know that I am not alone in my lack of access to appropriate training and resources. Every day overtaxed and under-supported administrators and educators across the country wake up trying to maximize their own potential, live their calling, and serve their communities. Who is helping them? What training do they receive? What are college EDU programs doing to ready their students for classrooms full of the effects of fear and trauma? They are the ones who can lift our students up – or allow them to slip out of reach. With the odds stacked against them, the latter is more common than the former.

This book argues that we can meet the fears of our time with courage. Fear and courage have a relationship. Whether fear manifests itself as caution, apprehension, or flat-out terror; whether we feel fear internally or exhibit outward symptoms (trembling, sweating, or a shaky voice), courage allows us to meet those fears. The word “courage” has its root in the Latin word *cor* meaning heart, as “the seat of feeling.” Author Brené Brown writes “Courage is a

heart word … In its earliest forms, the word courage meant ‘to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart’” (Brown 2007, p. x).

Educators enter the teaching profession with great hope, empathy, and the determination to make a difference. Each teacher has a theory about learning and how children develop, learn, and manage their academic achievements. Lev Vygotsky was no exception. As a Russian psychologist and educator, whose brilliant theories about the process of children's learning and development were lost for almost a half a century after he was banned by an oppressive Russia in 1934, his ideas are applicable to *Courageous Classrooms*.

Vygotsky did not believe that how children learn was based on their genetic history, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class. He believed in the critical role of adults as mediators, “that is, the engagement of children in age-appropriate activities, in the context of which adults promote the development in children of new motives and teach them new tools of thinking, problems solving and self-regulation” (Karpov 2014, p. 9). Good teachers know this and reach across stereotypes and bias to connect to their students. Parents know this and try to model and teach accordingly.

Zaretta Hammond, a former English teacher and sought-after speaker on issues of equity, literacy, and culturally responsive teaching writes of Vygotsky and his sociocultural nature of learning that students develop agency and independence when they're in spaces that promote connecting with others through conversation and have the freedom to give voice to the narration of their own lives. *Courageous Classrooms* endorse that theory because we argue for classrooms that promote psychological safety, openness, an awareness of children's developmental stages, the importance of building educational capacity

through emotional regulation, and the management of emotions in the service of safety, listening, and shared empathy.

To live courageously, we must build our inner resources. We must adopt a mindset based on our own self-awareness of what's happening in our lives at every moment, one focused on thriving not just surviving and rooted in successful adaptation to challenges instead of impulsive reactions. Our brain is wired for a courageous mindset, but it must be initiated by flipping on the switch of creative, curious thought.

What to Expect in This Book

The goal of *Courageous Classrooms* is to help both students and teachers interact in ways that promote a courage-based mindset, develop a positive adaptation to trauma and fear, and realize that courage in the face of fear within classrooms is a necessary choice. This book will utilize three principles to illustrate three truths for students and teachers:

1. the power of story and narrative for self-awareness;
2. the role of educators as *encouragers* of students; and
3. the importance of a courageous mindset.

The framework for the book is:

- Teachers and students have stress, fearful experiences, and trauma.
- Fear and trauma inhibit learning and contribute to anxiety-linked conditions.
- Courageous classrooms promote healthy learning related to resolving conflict, eliminating bullying, and

maximizing potential.

- A fear response can be modified by fear extinction, fear reversal, and cognitive regulation of fear by attending to it (thoughts), regulating it (visual imagery), and choosing courage (persevering through fear).

Teachers who are encouragers (embodying and instilling more courage) provide appropriate encouragement to their students as an important mechanism in response to pain and to facilitate their growth and learning. They provide *value* in the interaction with their acceptance, attention, and affirmations; *insight* by being sensitive to a student's present emotional level and sharing that insight with the student; and *challenge* students to build on past learnings about how they successfully handled a situation, to keep trying as they think, grow, and take positive actions. Teachers who are encouragers also constantly re-evaluate their own skills with the goal of building courageous classrooms and their own self-efficacy.

At the heart of this work is a belief that teaching needs to be done with empathy, compassion, understanding, and love. It is written with the sincere wish that educators continue to work fearlessly, because the welfare, education, and safety of their students is their primary concern. Teachers wear many hats, including those of counselor, disciplinarian, role model, and a friendly shoulder to lean on. Managing their students, empowering them, and keeping them safe in the classroom and halls of the school while doing their primary job as educators is not easy. Teachers are on the frontline, weathering the storm of student fears while managing their own in times of stress, anxiety, and conflict. The courage of educators is a beacon of light that we need to continue to shine brightly for students, and *Courageous Classrooms* will promote creativity, communication, compassion, confidence,

freedom, connectedness, and courage over fear. Read and join the movement of courageous classrooms. Start a conversation.

Chapter 1
The Brain's Fear System

Fear Is Normal

Fear is a normal part of psychological development for infants and children and critical to our survival across the lifespan. At every developmental stage, conquering fear allows children to grow, take risks, be adventurous, remain open to possibilities, and stay curious. Traversing through life is dependent upon the brain identifying patterns of familiar associations that may signal a dangerous outcome versus safety, and the ability to update those associations as our circumstances change. Fear is the associated learning of memories and the emotional and internal response generated by them. As we grow and develop throughout our lives, fear learning (distinguishing between what's safe and/or dangerous) and the ability to overcome or adapt to fear (fear extinction) by diminishing, reversing, or cognitively controlling fear as our circumstances change, is important to our survival, growth, and learning.

Infants learn early from their caregivers the necessary cues of who may be a threat and who is safe and who needs to be kept around. Infants learn early how to recognize and remember their caregiver by how they are touched, what they hear, smell, and can see (Debiec and Sullivan 2017). The quality and characteristics of those interactions shape infant behavior and physiologic response early on. Psychologist John Bowlby theorized that an attachment relationship to at least one primary caregiver is the most important aspect of social and emotional learning for a child. Attachment learning begins at birth and so does the learning of fear.

Caregivers can trigger a fear response in infants and children through social referencing. Social referencing refers to how a child uses caregiver cues to evaluate certain situations, like when a stranger comes close. Studies show that infants are very sensitive to a caregiver's emotional state, including fear and anxiety and readily pick up on it. From birth, we are primed to both attach for safety to our caregivers, learn about fear from them, and practice behavior that promotes our survival. Students utilize the same cues from teachers.

As children get older, what they fear may change. While younger children might fear the dark or scary monsters, older kids will shift to current events, like Covid-19, car accidents, or a family member being hurt. Our kids are always paying attention to what we discuss as adults and they sense what we are afraid of. Too much unmonitored time watching the news or being on social media without the context of feeling safe by having a discussion with their parents or teachers may increase children's fears by contributing to uncertainty and feeling unprotected.

Children will process fear depending on their age, the intensity and duration of exposure to a threat or image, and context. As adults do, children will use a variety of coping behaviors when dealing with a fearful event. Children may want to cuddle more or be clingy, try to take control of the situation by asking questions to understand, or cry and disengage. They reach for reassurance or safety by turning to a familiar face or favorite stuffed animal – all normal responses.

Although fear has been described by some researchers as a “childish emotion” that must be repressed in order to be considered mature, fear is not an emotion: it's a sensory and an evolutionary response that generates emotions. Fear is a brain and body phenomenon that connects our

internal and external experiences to keep us safe. When a mother scares her child by screaming at him to not run out into traffic, the combination of being startled by her voice and actions will generate a fear memory (utilizing his senses, inner feelings, and being startled) that will be retained and direct him to look both ways when crossing the street. Now jump back thousands of years, and replace “traffic” with a hungry lion, and fear response begins to make a lot of sense.

Fear Keeps Us Alive

Avoiding being eaten by predators is an early evolutionary task of animals and humans. Basic survival is one of the most cogent demands in the ecosystem. The neurophysiology of both our body and brain for survival has been engineered and adapted over time for one reason … *staying alive*. Charles Darwin, a biologist and geologist known for his writings about our human struggle for existence through natural selection, said, “Organisms unable to adapt to the demands of their environment will fail to pass on their genes and fall as casualties in the ‘war on nature’” (Darwin 1871).

Human beings are tasked with being smarter than their predators while managing the demands of eating, sleeping, procreating, and avoiding being resource depleted. Lines are drawn as we constantly monitor whether we can safely eat, live, and sleep. Imagine your brain on a Zoom conference call that never stops: there's cross talk and background noise, distractions abound, feelings arise – anxiety, excitement, boredom, anger, frustration – you want to exit, but your brain never hits “leave the meeting.” Our brain has the ability to uniquely focus, allowing us to respond to different environments, and circumstances whether they are non-threatening or life-endangering, 24/7.

Fear can result from the presence of a real threat that may be in your face or miles away. The level of danger that you feel is anchored in how close it is and how great the potential is for it to get closer. If you have had the experience of listening to weather forecasts that start as a threat, advance to a warning, and leap to blaring sirens instructing you to take immediate cover, then chances are you have experienced the physiological symptoms of fear: increased heart rate, rapid breathing, sweaty hands, and a sinking feeling in your gut. At the same time, your brain is processing the depth of danger and sending biochemical messages throughout your body.

In that same situation of an ominous weather forecast, anxiety may present when you hear the initial forecast, and will depend on both your experience with bad storms, or watching others' bad experiences with storms, or simply having a personality that worries about natural disasters. Anxiety can occur with remote, unusual, or abstract triggers that usually aren't related to a direct threat. Anxiety can occur in conditions that are safe, but lead to *what if* thoughts triggering brain and body unrest.

Both anxiety and fear can lead to avoidance behavior, and involve emotions that can invade our sense of well-being. It's important to understand that even with fear and anxiety we have time to think, assess the threat, determine if we need to run or fight or relax and stay put. The key point here is when you feel fearful, notice your anxiety … take a breath. When our brain perceives a threat, it actively will work for our safety and survival.

To survive, animals and humans must know how to recognize and respond to a threat. Our preferred state is to be in a safe, secure place. When we are chilled and stress free, we are in balance and can focus on finding food, relaxing with friends or family, engaging in romantic

pursuits, and teaching or learning with a clear head. If the risk of a threat appears, is felt but not detectable and there is no obvious danger yet, we may be wary but are still good. In the presence of a detectable threat or predator, all systems are “go” and either we freeze, run away, or fight. As presumed prey, our singular goal is to escape and fight only if we have to; the predator's goal is to capture and consume.

When there is a smell, sound, glance, taste, or perception of danger, our brain adapts to multi-sensory mode. Fear is not produced from only one brain region but is a network of brain structures that coordinate responses (see Appendix A). The amygdala, an almond shaped structure located in the temporal lobe is one of those. The amygdala is a part of the brain's ancient neural circuits and part of the limbic system and receives inputs from our senses. The limbic system supports emotion, behavior, long-term memory, and input from our senses. It influences how we respond to stress and the stress response by its interaction with other brain systems like the endocrine system and autonomic nervous system. The amygdala plays a role in fear expression, fear learning, and fear extinction. Emotional, behavioral, and physiological responses to fear are all mediated by the amygdala (Gozzi et al. 2010). The amygdala has multiple nuclei that function to enhance fear and messaging to engage the stress response in the brainstem or to engage the prefrontal cortex for behavioral control and resilience coping (Sinha et al. 2016). Sitting next to the amygdala lies one of the oldest brain structures; the hypothalamus. It relays fear-related information to the amygdala and prefrontal cortex and is a critical structure for learning, memory, and fear behavior (Hasan et al. 2019). Oxytocin, a neuropeptide produced by the hypothalamus and released by the pituitary gland, plays a role in the behavioral response to fear, specifically freezing