The Self-Help Genre and the Perpetuation of Fear in America in Gavin de Becker's *The Gift of Fear*

> "The increasing significance of affect as a focus of analysis across a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourses is occurring at a time when critical theory is facing the analytical challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism. If these world events can be said to be symptomatic of ongoing political, economic, and cultural transformations, then the turn to affect may be registering a change in the co-functioning of the political, economic, and cultural"
> - Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*

"This," my mother said, "will protect you." Even at fifteen, with very little of the world beneath my feet, I doubted that a mass of pages the size of a dime novel could do anything to protect me. As I glanced over the cover, I doubted it even more. *The Gift of Fear: And Other Survival Signs that Protect Us from Violence* by Gavin de Becker. At the time, I did not dare to question my mother or the higher officials in the Methodist Church who passed this text down to her. I did not have the words to articulate how the idea of *fear* as a gift made me feel ill. I could not tell my mother that I was afraid of everything, that fear *was* my driving force and my greatest weakness. I was afraid I was dying by the time I was seven. I could not ride in the car at night without hyperventilating. I went to bed each night *expecting* not to wake up and terrified when I did only to start the cycle over again. Over the years, my parents tried everything. I went to therapists, counselors, and doctors. I exhausted our medical insurance on trips to the emergency room for heart palpitations and chest pains. I became "the girl who cried death." Nothing was ever wrong with me, not even after I was officially diagnosed with severe anxiety. I stayed unmedicated and largely untreated. I crumbled under my anxiety as I became anxious about my fears and fearful of my anxiety, and in my freshman year of high school, I nearly lost the ability to function. Standing there, in the kitchen of my childhood home, face flushed from a recent

anxiety attack and holding the book my mother gave me, I did not say what I was thinking: "You think a book can fix all of that?"

I begin my exploration of the self-help genre and what Beth Blum terms the "self-help compulsion" with this personal anecdote if only to demonstrate the personal intricacies of the self-help genre. It is a genre that appeals to our material desires, basic needs, and internal aspirations. Self-help is at once an industry "fueled largely by fear, anxiety, and insecurity" but also "offers a reminder of the promises of transformation, agency, culture, and wisdom that draw readers to books" (Blum 7). As Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn so aptly puts it in her reading of the film *Eat, Pray, Love,* an adaptation of the memoir *Eat, Pray, Love Made Me Do It,* self-help intervenes in "the classic tale of a person's awakening to feelings of profound unease after taking life just as prescribed by the dominant norms of her social set and social setting and finding that life sorely wanting" (75). Just as Liz (Julia Roberts) realizes she is unhappy with her life, her marriage, and the monotony of her day-to-day life, she seeks guidance from a seer in Bali who tells her to "find balance." She seeks guidance only after feeling that her pre-prescribed life is unfulfilling and that the role she is *supposed* to play is not the role she is destined to. Self-help works by at once collectivizing and individualizing the experience of reading as the text must appeal to a large, general population while also convincing the reader the wisdom is applicable to them individually. Self-help, then, must exist between the general and the specific.

The paradoxical existence of self-help has only become easier in lieu of the internet. As a medium increasingly concerned with providing users with individualized experiences through targeted ads and manufactured search results, the internet ensures that nearly every person has read a piece of media classified as "self-help." The typing of the phrase "how to…" followed by a number of different options including, but not limited to, "get a girlfriend," "make more

money," or "live a better life" have at some point graced the keyboard of nearly every person on the internet. Yet, despite thriving through this new form of media proliferation, the predisposition and desire to make oneself "better" is not new. It has a long and strategic history, existing first in the form of ancient etiquette books and cautionary tales and developing alongside late-nineteenth-century economic and class mobility that sparked concern about one's outward physical and atmospheric presence. European preoccupation with self-improvement carried to the Americas creating a "seemingly indissoluble association with American nationalism" (Blum 11). Despite its rich history, self-help is often overlooked in literary studies. An "omission [is] even more glaring in light of the fact that self-help guides are among the most lucrative book genres of the past thirty years, with approximately 150 new self-help titles published every week" (Blum 7). According to NPD Bookscan, data analysis that tracks the American publishing markets, the self-help industry has seen a significant increase in "the number of unique international standard book numbers (ISBNs) rising nearly three-fold from 30,897 in 2013 to 85,253 in 2019."

Similarly, in the last thirty years, affect theory has come into popular conversation with literary studies. In 1677, Benedict de Spinoza attempted to propose an early iteration of affect theory. His theory, presented in his text *Ethics,* asserted that, "by affect, I understand affectations of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (Spinoza 1996, 3). This idea of affect, though setting the groundwork for later explorations of affect in affect theory, was largely dismissed as his writings pushed against the dominant religion of the time. He was later excommunicated from his community and academia at large. Though once rejected from the academic field, much like the genre of self-help Blum explores through Dale Carnegie's rejected text *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), affect theory

found its academic footing in the early 90s in a nearly identical timeline to the proliferation of self-help literature. By looking at the rise of affect theory and the proliferation of self-help, more specifically the sub-genre of "personal security," I argue that self-help puts into practice what early affect theorists attempted to theorize. Like Raymond Williams' attempt to articulate the need for discussions about ideas not yet solidified, the self-help genre attempted to solidify ideas before full fruition resulting in literature on personal security that promotes paranoid reading under the guise of attaining "fearlessness." In his self-help book *The Gift of Fear: And Other Survival Signs that Protect us from Violence* (1997) de Becker asserts that intuition, or fear, can and will protect us if we know how to listen to it; however, I argue that what de Becker is identifying as fear is actually paranoia mistakenly identified as fear in the advent of affect theory studies. Despite his mis-classification of paranoia, de Becker's text demonstrates the way in which self-help literature concerned with personal security engages directly with affect theory.

Intertwining Histories: Self-Help, Security, and the Affective Turn

The self-help genre has an extensive history that few have taken the time to catalog. According to Blum's research, self-help may have originated as early as ancient Egypt with "sebayt" or "teachings" demonstrating the proper way for Egyptian peoples to live. The practice of etiquette texts continued into medieval times and flourished in the Renaissance practice of "the commonplace book". These books were an amalgamation of snippets of text from various works of literature with the intent to "'lay up a fund of knowledge, from which we may at all times select what is useful in the several pursuits of life' [Robert Darnton]" (Blum 2). In the 19th century, Samuel Smiles pioneered the commercial genre of self-help with his *Self-Help* (1859). In his renowned text, Smiles promotes upward mobility apart from wealth stating "riches and

rank have no necessary connection with genuine gentlemanly qualities… the poor man with a rich spirit is in all ways superior to the rich man with a poor spirit" (382).

In America, the rise of self-help is often attributed to Benjamin Franklin. Though Franklin never published his own self-help text, his conversations in his 1791 *Autobiography* suggest what Blum terms "one of the earliest prototypes of the Western self-help manual" (11). Franklin suggests publishing a text that encourages virtue in order to gain happiness. Tentatively titled "The Art of Virtue," Franklin's self-help text was never fully realized. Despite Franklin's failed attempt to create a self-help text, both George Washington and John Adams created their own series of rules and regulations they deemed exemplified "civility." For Washington, these rules were drawn from those created by the French Jesuits in the 1500s and included rules such as "A man ought not to value himself of his achievements, or rare qualities of wit; much less of his riches, virtue or kindred" and "Speak not evil of the absent for it is unjust." It is important to note that early self-help, especially western self-help, operated more in line with etiquette books. Even still, they served the same purpose: to answer questions such as "what should I do?" or "how should I act?". Much like the self-help literature of today's climate, these texts attempted to quell the chaos of human nature. Without the ability to explain *why* humans think and act the way they do, they attempted to regulate these affectual practices through the self-help genre.

Before the advent of affect theory in the 1990s, the study of affect in general – affective studies – was most closely associated with ever increasing understanding of the human mind in the fields of psychology and sociology in the technological age of the last thirty years. In these thirty years, the sales of self-help literature, the importance of affectual studies, and conversations concerning security, safety, and criminal justice have also increased steadily,

almost simultaneously. Aside from Raymond Williams[1]' early exploration of discussing

unfinished ideas and projects in 1958, the late 20th century saw the most affect theory put into

practice. For sociology, this manifested in 1969 with Ervin Goffing and David Heise's affect

control theory. In this theory, all persons speak and act in a way that preserves the notions about

themselves they want others to have. As described in the second iteration of *Handbook of the*

Sociology of Emotions, "the main objective of the theory was to explain behavior in the context

of social interactions. Heise hoped to develop a formal framework that could describe both the

routine, expected role behaviors that people enact under normal circumstances and the creative

responses they generate when encountering noninstitutional situations" (Robinson et. al. 179).

This framework, constantly used in police investigations, attempts to theorize *why* someone acts

the way they do in order to profile and prevent further crimes — arguably the purpose of de

Becker's text as well. In 1974, the Federal Bureau of Investigation formed a Behavioral Science

Unit used to investigate serial rape and homicide cases in an attempt to develop ways in which to

profile, predict, and prevent further atrocities. The book *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite*

Serial Crime Unit (1995), authored by John E. Douglas and Mark Olshaker, details not only the

creation of the FBI's early profiling methods, but also the American determination to *understand*

the "why" behind some of America's most dangerous criminals.

The 1980s saw a proliferation of violence — specifically serial homicide — that many

criminologists and investigators such as Peter Vronsky[2] and John E. Douglas attribute to the

changing climate of travel with major roadways becoming more accessible and hitchhiking more

common. James Alan Fox, criminologist professor at Northeastern University, recounts in his

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[1] Williams, Raymond. "Structures of Feeling." *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 128–135.

[2] Vronsky, Peter. *American Serial Killers: The Epidemic Years 1950-2000.* Berkeley, 2020.

recent publication "Mass Murder in America: Trends, Characteristics, Explanations, and Policy Responses," that a recent decline in serial killings point to the fact that people are no longer as vulnerable. Yet, while serial killing has declined since the 1980s, violence in America only proliferated in the 1990s and the early 2000s with over 1,316 school shootings occurring on American soil since 1970, and 18% of those shootings occurring in the past 10 years. A study conducted by Vossekuil et. al. in 2002 revealed that 93% of these attacks were *planned in advance.* In other words, nearly every violent attack *could* possibly have been prevented with the proper screening and understanding of affect and behavioral studies.

By looking at the etymology of the word "affect", and specifically what Patricia Clough[3] terms "the affective turn," I want to assert there is an inherent *violence* in general affective studies that is most accurately and aptly portrayed in the behavioral science of crime and self-help literature concerned with personal security. The etymology of "affect" suggests a relationship to the self-help genre of theorizing and predicting the outcome of events. In its earliest iterations, affect meant "to attack" or "to be attacked by disease[4]." The American Psychological Association defines affective studies as concerned with "the idea that feelings and emotions are the primary motives for human behavior, with people desiring to maximize their positive feelings and minimize their negative ones." In a general, strictly scientific sense, affects are both positive and negative forces that are used for the benefit of *oneself.* General affective studies, then, is an inherently selfish discipline that seeks to theorize how people behave, often attempting to theorize how one manipulates the world *around* them to fit their own desires and understanding. Affect theory, on the other hand, seems to take the concepts of general affective

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[3] Clough, Patricia Ticineto, and Jean O'Malley Halley. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Duke University Press, 2007.
[4] Merriam-Webster, "Affect" definition

studies a step further by exploring, not simply identifying, the ways in which affects move on and through places, peoples, and things. Affect theory explores socio-cultural consequences of affect in practice. While there has been significant debate concerning how many affects are present in affect theory, and whether that be in general affective studies or affect theory specifically, one thing is abundantly clear. There are far more *negative* affects or "ugly feelings" as Sianne Ngai would call them, than there are positive ones. Just to name a few, APA uses Silvan Tomkins' model stating " eight primary affects are postulated: the positive ones of excitement and enjoyment; the negative ones of distress, fear, shame, disgust, and anger; and the relatively neutral one of interest". It seems, then, that it is impossible to ignore the *violence* present in affective studies and thus it seems that texts such as de Becker's and Douglas' that confront violence and its place in America are ripe for affect theory. Just as Williams was concerned with the pre-ideological intuition of human beings, de Becker is concerned with intuition and our ability to predict violence through, as I will assert, an affective (though pre-affective in practice) lens.

Self-Help as "Genre": Closing the Affective Gap[5]

As with most genres of literature, there are many subgenres of self-help literature. Most self-help literature is categorized based on the field of study the text developed through and uses to explore its ideas. De Becker's text, for example, would fall under the subgenre of "psychology." Despite this cataloging of self-help literature, the categories of genre and subgenre are still rather underdeveloped. In fact, self-help is not *technically* a genre itself, but rather a commercial

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[5] Used in computer sciences/artificial intelligence studies to describe the gap between computer generated emotions and deeply embedded personal feelings; see Zhao et. al. 2018 (Affective Image Content Analysis: A Comprehensive Survey)

product of a successful industry that is often shelved with fiction and non-fiction alike. That being said, through my exploration of the "genre" of self-help, I have identified four main categories: personal wellness (i.e. finance, organization, general "life skills"), spiritual wellness, physical wellness, and mental wellness. While there are various subcategories/subgenres associated with each of these larger categories, here I am primarily interested in what I am calling the subgenre of "personal security" that falls under "physical wellness."

Security and safety have become increasingly important to people living in America from the 80s onward manifesting in literature and popular culture alongside manifestation in life. In the last thirty years, America has witnessed a proliferation of violence perpetrated by "everyday citizens" such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, O.J. Simpson's trial the same year, and the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. The 2000s saw a new violence: terrorism. With the World Trade Center attack in 2001, the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013, and the Orlando nightclub shooting in 2015 to name a few, it is no wonder that American people have become increasingly concerned with their personal safety. Gavin de Becker's text *The Gift of Fear: And Other Survival Signs that Protect Us from Violence* written in 1997, was written at the beginning of the proliferation of violence in modern day America. In a time when news was increasingly easier to access and word traveled throughout the country at much faster rates due to technological advances in telephones, television, and the up-and-coming World Wide Web, de Becker's text directly addresses the growing fear of violence being cultivated in America. More specifically, de Becker argues that we can not only predict and prevent violence against ourselves and others, but that this ability is inherent and *instinctual*.

Genre itself does not affect our ability to protect ourselves. However, by looking at one of the most prominent affect theory scholars Lauren Berlant's discussion of genre, I want to

propose that the *genre* of self-help, and more specifically the sub-genre of personal security, is an early iteration of affect theory in practice as well as the way in which the "affective gap" between Berlant's "genres of life" and life itself is presumably filled. Though the term "affective gap" is not a term typically applied to affect theory, it works well to explain the relationship of the self-help reader and the self-help novel. The "affective gap" is most often used in response to artificial intelligence analysis as a way to describe the discrepancies between artificial emotion and human emotion (Zhao et. al. 5534). The gap referred to as the "affective gap" suggests there is a disparity between the generalized evocation of emotion and the deeply personal way in which human beings process emotion. While *The Gift of Fear* is *written* by a human being with personal emotions, so too is artificial intelligence programmed by persons with embodied human emotion. In both instances, there remains a "gap" between the generalized state of emotion or affect, in this case fear, and the *embodiment* of the emotion. With that in mind, it is not a stretch to assert that texts such as *The Gift of Fear* make generalized assumptions about the emotion of fear that may or may not reflect the deeply personal applications of the emotion found in its readers.

In their work *Cruel Optimism,* Berlant suggests that "genres provide an affective expectation of the experiences of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art" (6). Berlant asserts that we often use genre as a way of determining the success of our own day-to-day life as well as a motivating force to keep living. Though we are aware that our life is *not* like a movie, it is the *hope,* or *optimism,* embedded in these stories that identify what they call the *cruel optimism* of life. We know something to be a fabricated impossibility, but we hope for it nonetheless. They identify the condition of cruel optimism as occurring "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your own flourishing" (1). In this way, viewing life in terms

of "genre" sets one up for failure —the cruel optimism being that the failure is inherent. Yet, cruel optimism is also about living within crisis, an idea they work through more fully in their 2018 article "Genre Flailing." According to Berlant, genre flailing "is a mode of crisis management that arises after an object, or object world, becomes disturbed in a way that intrudes on one's confidence about how to move in it" (157). With the rise of violence in America, de Becker's novel attempts to fill in the gap between the *idea* of life as mimicking genre – the cruel optimism of *hoping* for the white picket fence, the 2.5 children, and the loving husband/wife – and the reality of the proliferation of violence that disrupts the "American Dream." De Becker's novel attempts to bridge that gap by suggesting ways to live the "American Dream" *in spite* of the violence.

Applying Berlant's interpretation of genre and its relationship to affect theory to de Becker's novel, it cannot be ignored that the *genre* of self-help proliferated seemingly simultaneously to the rise of affect theory. Williams' determination to address the "pre-ideological" qualities of affect and later Patricia Clough's interest in the way the technological age shaped the interest in affect theory identify a growing interest in the *why* of human behavior. In this same period, rather than posing the *why* question, the self-help genre, particularly the subgenre of personal security, attempts to answer it. To quote de Becker directly, "People can be very motivated to become control experts because an inability to predict behavior is absolutely intolerable for human beings and every other social animal. (The fact that most people act predictably is what holds human societies together)" (59). The personal security subgenre of self-help literature combines the theorized practices of general affective studies and affect theory specifically — at the time of de Becker's text only just beginning to surface in popular literary culture — and applies them to *life* quite literally encouraging one to base their interpretations and

expectations of the world on the arc of the *genre.* In other words, if you follow these rules, your story will end like the final lines of the text: "you'll see hazard only in those stormclouds where it exists and live life more fully in the clear skies between them" (de Becker 362).

De Becker's fear is both a tool and a hurdle. He asserts that fear is *helpful* in predicting violence — it is one of our most basic, intuitive emotions and through listening to it, we can prevent and avoid violent situations. Yet, he also cautions against living life *in* fear. Instead, he advocates for trusting intuition claiming "trusting intuition is the exact opposite of living in fear" (336). I bring this into the conversation here to point to one thing: A misinterpretation of fear, or as de Becker classifies it "misinformed intuition," paints a picture of the goal of attaining *fearlessness* through an understanding of fear and accurate intuition dangerously close to Berlant's cruel optimism. The desire for fearlessness which is arguably unattainable in the current American climate of racial, social, and political violence, is an obstacle to feelings of security and safety. I will look at de Becker's interpretation of fear more in the next section, but I want to end this one by suggesting that despite de Becker's somewhat paradoxical approach to fear as a means to fearlessness, his text and texts like his provide one of the best examples of early affect theory and its real-life application. Using Berlant's interpretations of the purpose of genre in life – an attempt to *know* one's future – alongside their use of "genre flailing" – describing what happens when one no longer feels confident about their ability to move through the world – it seems as if de Becker's text works to reconcile this "flailing" and close the affective gap between ideas of fear and fear manifest in the physical world.

You're So Paranoid You Probably Think It's Fear: Fear and Paranoia in *The Gift of Fear*

Fear has many different definitions, but de Becker is concerned with what he calls "real fear" (5). In describing the events leading up to the rape and attempted murder of one of his clients, Kelly, he describes her fear as "real fear, not like when we are startled, not like the fear we feel at a movie, or the fear of public speaking. This fear is a powerful ally that says 'Do what I tell you to do'" (5). It is both a gift and a curse, an ally and an adversary (11). Real fear is born from intuition which "many want to dismiss as a coincidence or a gut feeling" but "is in fact a cognitive process, faster than we recognize and far different from the familiar step-by-step thinking we rely on so willingly" (De Becker 28). Real fear, equated with and born from intuition, is often stunted by inaccurate information or false truths, the greatest of which, according to de Becker, "is that some people are not intuitive, as if this key survival element was somehow left out of them" (42). Finally, de Becker's fear is fleeting. He claims, "fear is not an emotion like sadness or happiness, either of which might last a long while. It is not a state, like anxiety. True fear is a survival signal that sounds only in the presence of danger" (337). That being said, de Becker's fear is very *specific.*

Despite de Becker's clear definition of fear, fear and paranoia share many of the same qualities. Both are, in a sense, anticipatory. As Ahmed demonstrates in exploration of fear, when we see a snake and feel fear, we are not afraid of the snake itself (63-4). We are afraid of the bite we *anticipate* will happen. In the same way, we are paranoid about something that has yet to happen, but has the *potential* to happen. Generally speaking, it seems that fear has an object. There is something, someone, some place, or some idea that is fearful, while paranoia is more distinctly linked to generalized feelings of anxiety. In her essay, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About," Eve Sedgwick address the way in which paranoia, and subsequently paranoid reading, are a large

part of our everyday explorations of the world and of ourselves. For Sedgwick, paranoia is anticipatory and reflexive. It is contagious and easily spread by individuals. Paranoia embodies fear and anxiety, both affects a part of the larger affect, as she claims, it "understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety […] a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one" (128). Fear is a symptom of Sedgwick's paranoia, but it is not paranoia itself. In addition to defining paranoia, Sedgwick asserts that the practice of paranoid reading has become the dominant way to interpret and understand the world. Paranoid reading, she claims, anticipates a negative response. Readers *expect* to disagree with the text they are reading simply because nothing can ever be entirely agreeable. One major flaw in de Becker's work is his avoidance of paranoia. In this way, intense paranoia or a paranoid reading of the world around one could simply be classified as "misinformed intuition" that signals fear (or subsequently does not) at inappropriate moments.

Many theorists have hypothesized the role of fear in the field of affect studies. In the chapter titled "The Affective Politics of Fear " in her larger work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Sarah Ahmed uses the example of Franz Fanon's experience as a black man to demonstrate the role of fear as an affect. She claims that fear is reliant on the relationship between two objects or bodies — here, the black body and the white body. Fear, Ahmed claims, is "an 'affective politics', which preserves only through announcing a threat to life itself" (64). In fearing for one's safety, the child in Fanon's example turns to his mother for love and protection. Thus, Ahmed asserts, fear is "*that which keeps alive the fantasy of love as the preservation of life*, but paradoxically only by announcing the possibility of death" (68). Ahmed's fear is rooted in the dichotomy of love and fear and life and death. Interestingly, Ahmed's fear accounts for

discrepancies in the "collectivization" of fear as an affect as she claims "fear works to align

bodily and social space: it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space

through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained" (70).

Despite passing between bodies and objects, the affect of fear is not felt in the same way. In fact,

for Ahmed, fear relies on "the other" or "the not" to determine what is worthy of fear and what is

not. Fear is, in its most basic form, political.

Less political in her understanding of fear, Ruth Leys explores the scientific origins of

fear as a subject of study in her article "How Did Fear Become a Scientific Object and What

Kind of Object is it?". Much like my exploration of the self-help genre and the attempt to predict

violence, Leys begins her article by exploring the work of Paul Eckman, an American

psychologist responsible for creating FACS (Facial Action Coding System), a series of photos

used to create a baseline understanding of the human ability to identify fear and other emotions

based on facial expressions alone. Eckman claimed his photos were culture-less and applicable to

any group of people. Drawing from Eckman's work, Antonia Damasio, a Portuguese

neuroscientist, sees "affective responses to biologically determined, adaptive processes that

depend on innately set devices with a long evolutionary history… emotions are fundamentally

stereotyped and automatic responses of the body and face that can occur automatically, without

conscious deliberation." (73). Yet, despite Eckman and Damasio's evidence cited to secure the

hypothesis that human beings can and do predict *accurately* the intentions and actions of others,

Leys concludes her argument by deducing that "human and nonhuman animals produce facial

behaviors or displays when it is strategically advantageous for them to do so and not at other

times, because displays are dynamic and often highly plastic social and communicative signals.

Deception is thus omnipresent in nature" (78). In other words, while it may be possible to deduce

basic information from someone's facial expressions, humans are largely self-interested beings who will manipulate and hide feelings based on personal desires.

Interested in the way in which fear manifests in the present, Brian Massumi identifies fear as "the anticipatory reality in the presence of a threatening future" (191). Like Ahmed, Massumi identifies the collective nature of *fear,* however, unlike Ahmed, Massumi identifies threat as what is shared in the collective political climate of fear. Where Ahmed sees anxiety, Massumi sees threat. In the same way that Ahmed's fear becomes a product of love and confronting possible death, Massumi's fear is "a *way of life.* According to Massumi, no matter "how many times fear is contained it will always also exceed the containment, because its capacity to self-regenerate will continue to loom and that looming will define the surrounding mood" (181). Massumi's fear is self-implicating, self-regenerating. It is born of threat and lives on as an anxious present and creates an atmosphere of fear. Despite the (f)actual number of fearsome events occurring in the world, "the mass affective production of felt threat-potential engulfs the (f)actuality of the comparatively small number of incidents where danger materialized. They blend together in a shared atmosphere of fear" (199).

After exploring various definitions of fear, there are three main points I wish to make here about the affect of fear and de Becker's interpretation of it. First, de Becker, Ahmed, and Massumi share the idea that fear is extremely temporal. Secondly, fear is an embodied experience and, thus, has the potential to be *intuitive.* Finally, Ahmed, Leys, and Massumi address what de Becker fails to note in his text: fear, though collective in practice, is not collective in experience.

As de Becker explains the "how" and the "why" of his position in the legal, literary, and psychological world, he relays stories of his childhood and the abuse he suffered at the hands of

his family members. He attributes his *practiced* ability to predict and prevent violence to his encounters with domestic violence at home: "because my childhood became all about prediction, I learned to live in the future" (58). As the word suggests, predicting violence inherently requires a retreat into the future and thoughts about the future. Ahmed argues, similarly, that "fear's relation to the object has an important temporal dimension: we fear an object that approaches us… the unpleasantness of fear also relates to the future. Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into the future" (65). Fear is always future-oriented. He defines fear as "the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future" (191). All three authors determine that *fear* is extremely fleeting and operates, by extension, in the future. Despite this, all three scholars see fear manifested in the present Ahmed identifies the present experience of fear as anxiety and the ways in which we align ourselves with the current perceptions of danger. Massumi claims one experiences a threat in the present and fear of the threat in the future. de Becker, unlike his counterparts here, views the conscious state of "fear" as "worry." In other words, de Becker says, "fear summons powerful predictive resources that tell us what might come next. It is that which might come next that we fear — what might happen, not what is happening" (341). Unlike Ahmed and Massumi, de Becker focuses on the negative aspects of fear as a future-orientation. In talking with a client about her nightly experience when parking her car, he reveals that "if she's scared to death every night, focused intently on what might happen, then no signal is reserved for when there actually is risk that needs her attention" (339). In other words, fear's orientation to the future can and often does, according to de Becker, separate us from the present in ways that "immunize us against the pain and hopelessness of the worst moments, but it also makes us reckless about our own safety" (de Becker 58).

Despite its future orientation, fear is an *embodied* experience. Ahmed, Levy, and Massumi agree that fear manifests on the body through physical facial features (Levy), physical body reactions (Ahmed's "shivering"), and physical actions through the body (Massumi). No matter what one calls the manifestation of fear in the present -- anxiety, threat, or worry --fear is present *at the level of the body.* Fear travels between bodies creating significance through its relationship to the bodies to which it sticks and to those it does not. It is dependent upon at least two objects -- the object *of fear* and the object *fearing*. In this way, it is possible to think of the fear of Ahmed, Levy, and Massumi as representative of the fear de Becker outlines in his work. If fear is a bodily experience, is it not possible, then to have an intuitive, instinctual reaction to anxiety/worry/threat?

While the potential for intuition in affect theory is supported by ideas of future-orientation, it is not a collective potentiality. Ahmed, Levy, and Massumi all agree that collectivity is an inherent aspect of fear itself. De Becker, it seems, would agree that fear is felt by everyone at some point for some reason (though those times and reasons may differ). But as Ahmed so aptly addresses, "fear works to align bodily and social space: it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained" (70). Fear, though felt by all, is not felt in the same way nor does it have the same effect on every person. It has an "intensity" identified by Massumi as the level of actualization — how fearful *something* is — that then translates to highly personalized, subjective experiences of fear. de Becker, in his consideration of fear, fails to address fear as a subjective object; however, he suggests that experiences that trigger *the same feelings of fear* are highly subjective. In speaking of his own life and his experience with violence, de Becker says, "though triggered by different occurrences, you felt the exact same

emotions that I felt. While some were painful and some were frightening, no experience of mine had any more impact on me than those of yours that had the greatest impact on you" (48). The affect of fear (*real* fear) is always objective for de Becker though the worry, anxiety, threat that manifests fear in the present may be vastly subjective.

De Becker's idea of objective fear does not translate well to the current cultural and political climate of the United States. For all its early applications of the up-and-coming affect theory, both de Becker's text and texts like that of John Douglas' *Mindhunter* identify a preoccupation with *the other* as a source of fear. For Douglas, and subsequently the higher officials in the FBI, the serial killer could not be like the "average person" — hence, the desire to create a profiling team to determine *who* had the potential to be dangerous. Though de Becker attempts to discredit this idea through his insistence that it is "recognizing the sameness that allows us to most accurately predict violence," his anti-subjective reading of fear itself suggests an understanding of fear based on the opposite: what makes this person different? (51). De Becker actively encourages a model of behavioral prediction that "can be improved by applying the rule of opposites" (98). This "rule of opposites" encourages looking at a situation from your own perspective and then contrasting that with the opposite of your perspective — presumably the perspective of the "other" in the situation. The instinct de Becker focuses on in his work is founded on the principle that we process information instinctively before we do so cognitively, and we are only alerted to the information that *deviates* from our perceived notions of what is "normal". While this perception is gendered — this is clearly addressed through de Becker's idea that "at core, men are afraid women will laugh at them, while at core, women are afraid men will kill them" (77) — de Becker does little to address the racial and sexual fears present in America that are presumably perpetrated by culturally imbedded "intuitions" of difference as threat.

In some ways, I want to give de Becker the benefit of the doubt as his text was published in 1997. The fact that he addresses the violence statistics of men versus women —"the language in this book is mostly gender-specific to men… because here, at least, politically correct would be statistically incorrect" (xi) — is promising, but his inability to address problems of race and discrimination present at the time and arguably major sources of fear in America is concerning and renders his text less about the identification and management of fear, and more about cultivating paranoid ways of reading the world. The language of "same" and "different" persistent throughout de Becker's text encourages Sedgwick's paranoid reading. We are determined to see *difference* in people rather than *sameness.* Though de Becker claims seeking a connection with others is a primary behavior that "can be applied to most of us," he emphasizes the instinctual desire to identify anything that is *different* (93). In his examples ranging from violent crimes such as rape or attempted murder to workplace harassment and stalking, in each instance he asks his clients to identify instances of strangeness or difference. For his first example of Kelly, a rape victim, she notes she knew something was wrong because her rapist closed the window. Following the logic of "normal" human behavior, he had no reason to do this as "he was dressed and supposedly leaving" (5). Yet, it is this disruption, this difference in logic, that alerted Kelly to his true intentions: to avoid being heard as he murdered her.

Identifying differences in logic is not, in and of itself, in danger of profiling based on race and sexuality. While de Becker begins his conversation about intuition and fear focusing on differences in logic, he extends this conversation to differences in *embodiment.* De Becker uses the example of profiling at the airport. If someone is late for a flight, they might walk quickly, speak sharply, and look otherwise anxious. Yet these same signs might indicate that someone is planning danger of some sort: whether it be hijacking or assault. Our intuition, he claims, would

alert us to these *embodied* emotions of stress, anxiety, and irritation from which we would then use *context* to determine the intensity of danger. In this case, "the man insists on being first in the ticket line at the airport, looks frequently at his watch, appears exasperated by the slowness of the ticket agent" and thus he is perceived as being late for a flight (98). What de Becker does not explore in his conversations about context, however, is the context of *race.* What if this man is Arab running through an American airport? Similarly, looking at Kelly's situation again, with Kelly as a white female and her assailant a "friendly and gentlemanly" white male, would she have been more "intuitive" had this man been African American? While de Becker is not unaffected by gender politics and the specific plights of women, he unconsciously ignores the *context* that is race in America. By not addressing the *difference* that is race, he implies that culturally-learned biases, such as those based on discrimination that interpret difference through variations in race, ethnicity, and cultural background, are valid ways of predicting and preventing violence. In this way, De Becker's fear is not simply fear, but a way of reading the world that promotes fear — that encourages the paranoid notion that any difference is negative.

I want to conclude my exploration of De Becker's fear as paranoia with a culturally relevant and time-specific example: the death of Trayvon Martin. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old high school student in Florida, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman on the way home from the local 7-11. Previous to killing Martin, Zimmerman, it was reported, had called the police station multiple times identifying "suspicious individuals" all of which were identified as Black. When Martin, walking home in the evening, noticed he was being followed by Zimmerman, he began to run and, though seeing Martin was unarmed, Zimmerman shot him directly in the chest. It is strange to view this event through the lens of de Becker's fear. The *context* was that Zimmerman was patrolling the area after a series of break-ins. Zimmerman was

anticipating violence. Martin was simply walking home from his local gas station, talking on the phone with his girlfriend. Martin's *response* to being followed was to run. Zimmerman saw this as a threat. The issue, of course, is not that Martin was running. It was that Martin was a *Black* person running. Think to yourself, would Zimmerman have reacted the way he did if the victim was white? Would the white 17-year-old have started running? In their article "Race, Fear, and Affect in the Death of Trayvon Martin," Mauricio T. Torres and his team explore Ahmed's affective politics of fear and her assertion of fear as not simply originating within the body in response to something fearsome. Using the affective economy, Torres et al. argue that "we ought to think of Zimmerman's fear as a product of history rather than something originating in Zimmerman and brought on by Martin, the fearsome object" (1116). Martin was not fearsome himself. Instead, the cultural and racial biases instilled in Zimmerman produced in him a *fear* of Martin. This fear, though de Becker would argue is contextualized by the previous burglaries in the area, is a product of *history,* a context de Becker does not consider. In 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of Trayvon Martin. The jury, containing one Black person, voted to find Zimmerman not-guilty on all accounts. The danger inherent in de Becker's conception of fear is a lack of *historical* context. His focus on the intuitive and the innate behaviors of human beings as a whole, rejects the culturally formed *innate* behaviors of Black and "Othered" bodies in America. The history of violence against Black people in America informed Martin's fear of being followed by a white man. Zimmerman's racially historicized idea of *Black* as dangerous influenced his actions and the subsequent actions of the jurors. By not taking race into account, de Becker risks promoting fear and subsequent violence based on racial differences and culturally learned biases masked as "intuition."

In de Becker's current imagining of the world, his work unknowingly promotes profiling based on *difference.* Intuition is always misinformed and pre-conditioned to see instances of racial and sexual difference as *threatening.* De Becker asserts that intuition, or fear, can and will protect us if we know how to listen to it; however, I argue that what de Becker is identifying as fear is actually the practice of paranoid reading mistakenly identified as fear in the advent of affect theory studies. The limitations of the self-help genre and its desire to make the personal universal and the universal personal, only perpetrates a reading of "personal security" as protection against *the other* -- the racialized other, the ethnic other, the sexual other -- specific to the increasingly violent climate in America. Furthermore, the sub-genre of self-help literature identified as "personal security" in the current climate of racial violence, violence against women, and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, has inspired a plethora of books that claim to help predict and prevent violence in order to manage fear, yet, in reality, these texts create and promote an American cultural paranoia that normalizes and propagates violence based on race, gender, and sexuality.

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