

A Shrink Studies SCUBA

Phobias

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Agoraphobia
(fear of open spaces or of leaving a safe place)

Last week I may have displayed some favoritism towards Bonaire as “A Diver’s Paradise.” Therefore, to balance my flagrant investigator and author and home-owner bias, I will examine a few named phobias which can be experienced on Bonaire. Selene Yeager also prompted this topic when she recently asked me to help her with an up-coming article in *Scuba Diving* magazine on “Scuba-phobia.”

Even though we all “breathe” amniotic fluid for months while swimming in the dark confines of our mother’s womb until our first gasp of air at birth, a primal fear is that of suffocating while breathing underwater. As Divers Alert Network vice president of research and former USN SEAL, Dr. Richard “Dick” Vann, puts it, “Breathing underwater is unnatural.” In our year 2000 survey the relative risk of panic when a diver “inhaled water instead of air” was 1.8 for men (n=9292) and 1.5 for women (n=2929). This applies as much to diving on Bonaire as anywhere else.

According to the APA’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (1994), a Simple Phobia is a “marked and persistent fear that is excessive or unreasonable, cued by the presence or anticipation of a specific object or situation” and “the avoidance, anxious anticipation, or distress in the feared situation(s) interferes significantly with the person’s normal routine. . . , or there is marked distress about having the phobia.” Agoraphobia (fear of being in places from which escape might be difficult or embarrassing) and claustrophobia (fear of confined places) are classic phobias that apply to scuba diving.

Combine the childhood fairy tale Hansel and Gretel’s fear of being baked in an oven and eaten (phagophobia) and the movie *Jaws* (selachophobia) and you get phagophobia-selachophobia (fear of being eaten by sharks). In our 2000 survey the relative risk of panic when a diver was in the presence of a shark was only 0.2 for men (n=9292) and 0.1 for women (n=2929). Bonaire is not known for shark attacks so I would consider such a fear



Cymophobia/kymophobia
(fear of waves or wave-like motions)



Claustrophobia
(fear of confined places)

unreasonable and hardly a reason to avoid diving on Bari Reef. All the same, one movie we do NOT have in our Sand Dollar Condo Resort rental unit is *Jaws*. There’s no point in spooking our guests and spoiling their vacation.

Other phobias diving on Bonaire might be bathmophobia/climacophobia (fear of climbing 1000 Steps), urophobia/bromidrosiphobia (fear of urinating in your wetsuit and smelling), frigophobia/rhytiphobia (fear of being cold/wrinkled after too much time underwater), pteronophobia (fear of feather duster worms), ataxophobia/nebulaphobia (fear of mask flooding/fogging), acarophobia (fear of mosquitoes and other insects whose bites cause itching), aichmophobia (fear of sea urchin needles/spines), thalassophobia (fear of the ocean or sea), cymophobia/kymophobia (fear of waves or wave-like motions), venustraphobia/gymnophobia (fear of beautiful/nude women sunbathing), ichthyophobia (fear of fish), bathophobia (fear of depth), pyrophobia (fear of fire coral), amychophobia (fear of being scratched by coral), and photoaugliaphobia (fear of glaring dive lights). □ David F. Colvard. All photos except sea-horse by Colvard.



Selachophobia
(fear of Jaws)



Ostraconophobia
(fear of shellfish—cleaner shrimp and lobster)



Catapedaphobia
(fear of jumping from high and low places —LaDania’s Leap)



Equinophobia
(fear of horses—sea)
Photo by Maria Uyarra

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