Excitement as the Felt Experience

Brendan Lloyd PhD, September 2024, *r*: 0.0

There might be something that we need to clear up in relation to excitement. If adrenaline plays such a large part in the experience of anxiety, then how do you explain excitement? Adrenaline also plays a significant role in the *felt experience of excitement*, no doubt about it.

As an illustration, imagine that you're on your surfboard and that you're paddling out through the breakers. You battle your way to the back of the waves. That tingle of anticipation is the first sign of the adrenaline.

From behind the waves, you slowly edge toward the break and at the right moment you paddle like crazy. You stand up. Everything hinges on your ability to pull it off.

You steer the board down and along the face of the wave. As the wave develops it curls over you. You experience that rush. You're now travelling fast in a tube of water. You need to crouch on the board. Now the adrenaline is palpable. You can't believe your luck.

Finally, the wave dissolves and breaks down. The adrenaline is there for a short while. By the time you get out of the water and get to your towel, the adrenaline has all but subsided. You are left with a memory of the thrill.

Some of us actually get on those crazy rides at places like Dream World. You take your seat on the Tower of Terror knowing full well that failure will mean your death. You would fully understand that people do actually get killed in these places. It's on the news. It's in the media. Yet you take the seat; you are cranked up to 119 metres; and then you are dropped.

You challenge the odds and you slam down on your emergency button as you plummet to the ground screaming. When the ride is over, by the time it takes you to climb out of the seat and make your way off the ride, the adrenaline will subside. The excitement will become a memory of the thrill.

In a change of scene just how exciting is it to nearly get flattened by a bus? There you are crossing the road. You look up and there's the 6-40 bus bearing down on you. You see it just in time. Instantly your body is flooded with adrenaline. You leap out of the way.

By the time you've landed on the footpath, dusted yourself off and looked around, the adrenaline would have subsided. You're left with a memory of the close call.

The point in these illustrations is that adrenaline doesn't linger for long. It disburses fairly quickly. Even if you were to be injected with a large dose of adrenaline the effect and the feeling would last for minutes[i]. Adrenaline will not lurk in our body for an extended period of time.

In spite of the adrenaline in common, there are two important differences between excitement and anxiety. Firstly, with excitement there is usually an intention or an expectation for excitement. Secondly, and most importantly, excitement is something that happens during events that finish or conclude. Anxiety, on the other hand, is from ongoing triggering where there is no finish or conclusion.

For the *excitement experience* the emergency button is disengaged at a *closing point*. For example, the demand is resolved. The ride is over. The race is run. The risk paid off. The challenge is achieved. Under such *resolvable conditions* the chemical structures of your body will quickly return to baseline. Under the ideal conditions your adrenaline ebbs and flows; it comes and goes as is required. By nature, it is quick in and quick out.

r: revision number

For anxiety, the threat is not resolved. The emergency button is repeatedly activated to keep the adrenaline levels elevated.

How does that happen? You'd want to know, wouldn't you?

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Endnotes

[i] https://www.hormone.org/your-health-and-hormones/glands-and-hormones-a-to-z/hormones/adrenaline

