

Why your startle reflex is like an ‘exploitable data breach’

[T]he startle reflex might be an evolutionary point of origin for many of our most common human emotional expressions. When you look at still frames of a startle reaction, two features stand out: the pursing of skin around the eyes and the flashing of teeth.

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The startle has a side effect that has nothing to do with self-protection: It broadcasts personal information well beyond the simple fact that you are startled. The reason is that your moods and thoughts strongly influence how your startle reflex manifests itself in any given moment.

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Another creature, watching your startle reaction, could in principle learn a great deal about your inner state—and use that information to its advantage. Are you confident or anxious? More likely to run away, or more likely to go on the attack? Are you dominant over the people around you, or do you feel frightened by them?

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The startle reflex is not, itself, a social gesture. It’s not a smile, a laugh, or a frown. It’s simply a reflex that evolved to protect the body. But it puts you at risk, too. By leaking signs about your inner state to the rest of the world, it becomes an exploitable data breach.

Read full, original post: [How You React When Startled Is a Window Into Your Soul](#)