

Science shows Alex Honnold feels no fear

YOU may know Alex Honnold, whose death-defying feat stunned the world. But you don't know his brain is unlike anything scientists have ever seen.

YOU may have already heard about Alex Honnold, who climbed the mighty El Capitan in Yosemite National Park without any safety gear on the weekend.

[The elite rock climber reached the summit in about four hours using only his hands and feet.](#) The 31-year-old became the first person to climb the 3000-foot (914-metre) granite wall alone without a safety harness or ropes to catch him if he fell.

If you do already know his story, you may also be wondering how the hell he had the courage to attempt such a feat in the first place. Is he crazy or stupid? Or both?

Well, science has the answer.

Neuroscientists recently studied Honnold's brain. They put him in a large machine and then quickly showed him a series of terrifying and off-putting images — toilets overflowing with faeces, mangled and bloody faces, a climber dangling over the void — the sort of stuff that would send most people shivering, gagging, or both.

It didn't register with Honnold. They hadn't seen anything like it. His amygdala, the part of the brain that reacts to fear, lay dormant.

“Maybe his amygdala is not firing — he's having no internal reactions to these stimuli,” said neuroscientist Dr. Jane Joseph. “But it could be the case that he has such a well-honed regulatory system that he can say, ‘OK, I'm feeling all this stuff, my amygdala is going off,’ but his frontal cortex is just so powerful that it can calm him down.”

Medically, it would seem, Honnold does not experience fear. At least not in the way that you or I would. Or, if he does experience it, he requires a lot more to set it off than anyone this team of neuroscientists at least has ever studied.

What Honnold does have in spades, from a neurological perspective, is a tendency to seek out sensations, a drive nearly double that of your average brain based on their study. This pushes him, of course, but it also hints at something darker, something addictive.



Just your casual weekend adventure. *Source: YouTube*