

Cognitive Self Defense: Meta-Cognition for Mental Health

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Overview

Why Cognitive Self Defense?

- Against gaslighting, manipulation, deceit, etc.

Why we're vulnerable

- More than you may realize

What we can do

- Meta-cognitive discipline

Why cognitive self defense?

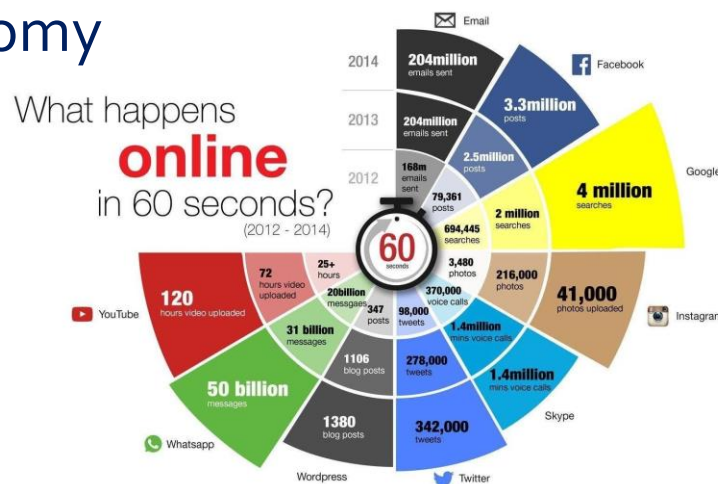
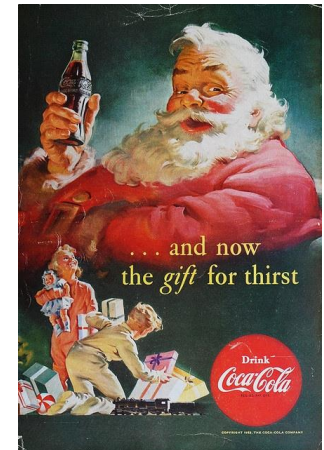
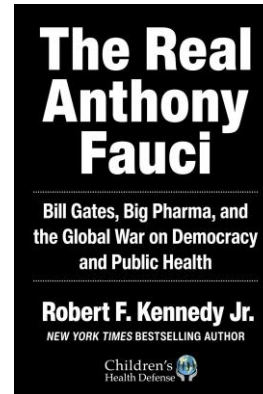
- Power struggles



- Sun Tzu's "Art of War" (5th century BC)
 - "Breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting"
 - "More important to outthink your enemy than to outfight him"
 - "All warfare is based on deception"
 - Divide and conquer

Why cognitive self defense?

- The Real Anthony Fauci
 - Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
- Theft of hearts and minds
 - Advertising
 - Attention economy



Why cognitive self defense?

Social engineering for profit

- Century of the Self

- "Although we feel we are free, in reality, we — like the politicians — have become the slaves of our own desires"— Adam Curtis
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Century_of_the_Self
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmgoR1Mo4>

- Manufacturing Consent

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manufacturing_Consent
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lizm3rvsOol>

- And many more!

Why cognitive self defense?

- Innate mechanisms can backfire
 - Delusions can harden
 - Challenges feel life-threatening
- We need
 - Strength: conviction in our beliefs
 - Flexibility: acceptance of correction

Why We're Vulnerable

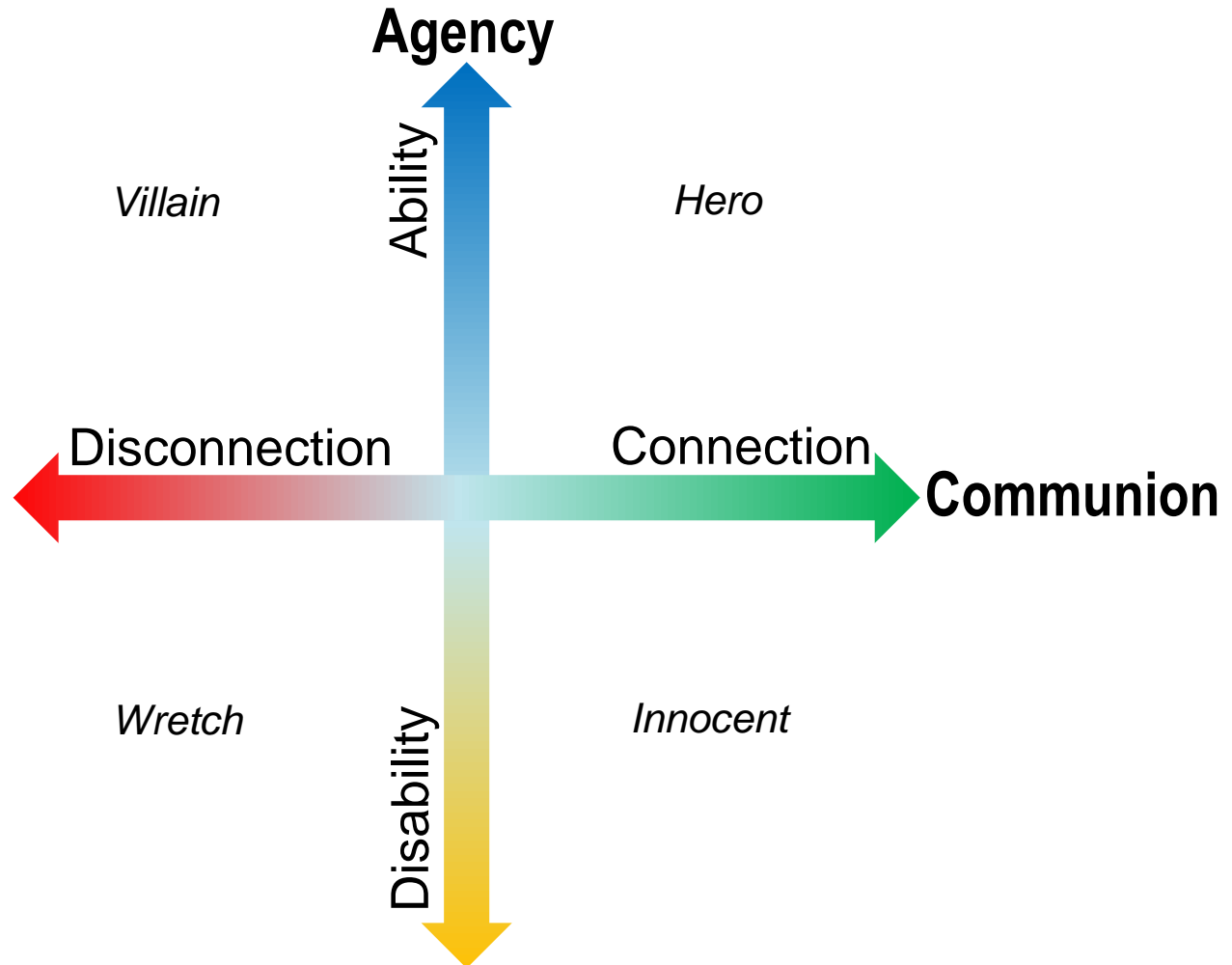
Humans are the virtualized animal

- More “software” than “hardware”
- Dissociated from reality



Dimensions of Existence

Motivations, behaviors, evaluations, characters, ...



The Virtualized Animal

- Virtualized agency: technology
 - “arranging the world that we don't have to experience it”
— Max Frisch
 - Cooking: nutritional dependence on pre-digestion
 - Tools: hunting, clothes, shelter
- Virtualized communion: language / culture
 - Virtual reality of common symbols / imagination
 - Shared psychosis (e.g., money)
 - Space: family, community, society
 - Time: education, story , ritual (ancestors)
 - Otherwise, not “human”

The Virtualized Animal

Agency \Leftrightarrow Technology

&

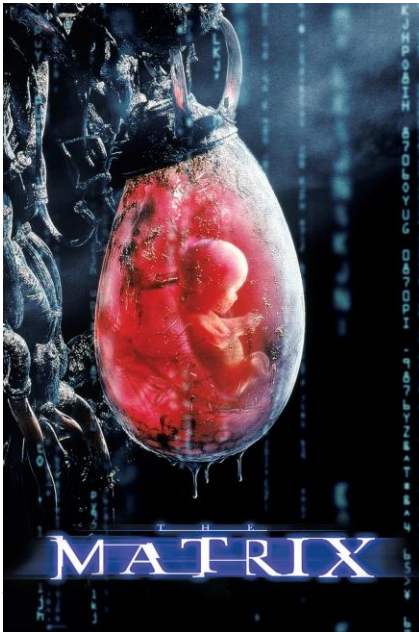
Communion \Leftrightarrow Language, Culture

\therefore

Control of technology and language

=

Remote control of us!



Acquiring Agency

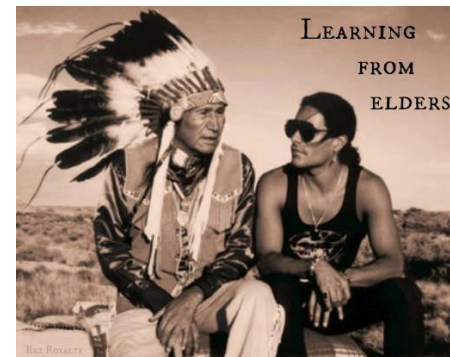
High-Fidelity Social Learning

- Uncritical imitation of teacher
- Reliability over efficiency
- Complex content



Cumulative Cultural Learning

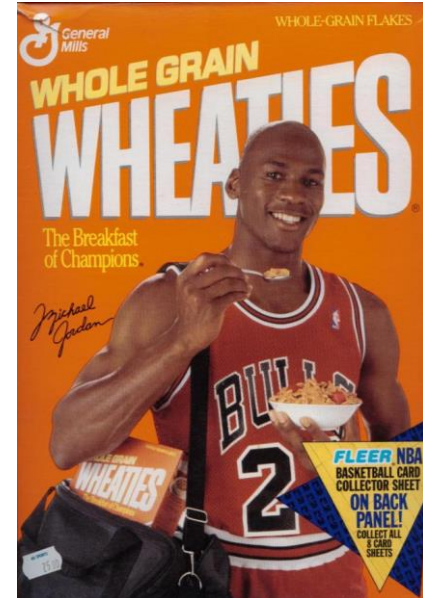
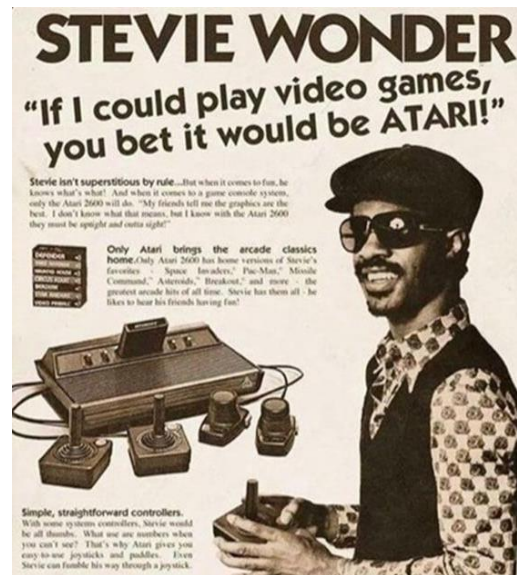
- Knowledge builds across generations
- Cultural evolution



Acquiring Agency

Prestige Bias

- Preference for learning from high-status individuals
- Valuing messenger over message



Maintaining Communion

Oxytocin (Empathy)

- In-group love
- Out-group hate



Social inclusion (avoiding exclusion)

- Exile can be worse than death
- Threat, greed increases connection
- Acetaminophen and anterior cingulate cortex



Maintaining Communion

Conformity

- Horizontal social learning
- Maintain social coherence
- Shame: behavioral self-censoring



Minimal Group Effect

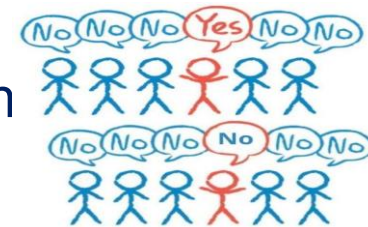
- Any grouping creates othering
- Low-level neurological effect



Group Coherence

Authoritarianism

- Submission to authority
 - Follow orders, don't question
- Conventionalism, dogmatism
 - Social conformity in behavior and thought
- Outgroup aggression
 - Punish dissent
 - Preserve agency, communion



Group = Identity = Survival

Identity depends on group membership

- Agentic identity (e.g., career)
- Communal identity (e.g., relationships)
- Threat to group = threat to self



Cognitive Vulnerabilities

- Thought shaped by culture, society
- Ideology as identity
- New ideas can be existential threat
- Unconscious mechanisms
- Beware your *isms!

Authoritarian Manipulation

Behavioral Immune System

- Protection from invisible threat
- Disgust



Political application

- “authoritarian governments are more likely to emerge in regions characterized by a high prevalence of disease-causing pathogens.” (Murray et al., 2013)
- “in addition to xenophobic attitudes, increased pathogenic threat is associated with ideological tendencies, such as authoritarianism, traditionalism, and political conservatism (Fincher et al., 2008; Thornhill & Fincher, 2007; Tybur et al., 2016).” (Pazhoohi & Kingstone, 2021)




15 Signs of an Abusive Relationship

- <https://www.thewmhi.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Abusive-Relationship-Infographic.pdf>
- <https://geoffolson.substack.com/p/are-you-in-an-abusive-relationship>


Self-Defense

Gaslighting


- Denying one's reality
- How do you know?
- What is real?

WHAT IS GASLIGHTING? 

When someone intentionally twists your perception of reality for their own gain.
Based on the play and movie, 'Gaslight.'

WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE? 

You're overreacting. **You need help.**
I didn't do that. **You're upset over nothing.**
You must be confused again.
Just calm down. **You're so dramatic.**
I never said that. **Why are you so defensive?**
What are you talking about? **It's your fault.**
You're so sensitive. **You twist things.**
I never said that. **Stop imagining things**
I was just joking.
You're remembering things wrong.
It's always something with you.

#DomesticViolenceAwarenessMonth 

Self-Defense

How has your worldview been shaped?



Self-Defense

How has your worldview been shaped?

worldview

Self-Defense

How has your worldview been shaped?

3.1415

Self-Defense

How has your worldview been shaped?

mIND

Self-Defense

How has your worldview been shaped?

EGO

Thai Realities



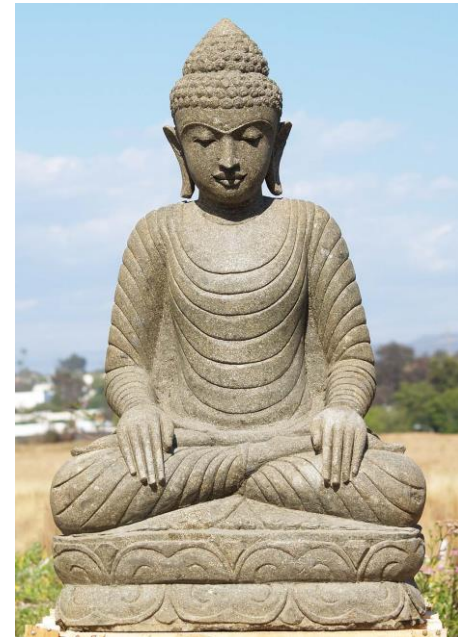
- Driving
- Eating
- Sex
- Religion



Self-Defense

Wisdom

- **Self-awareness;** humility; compassion
 - Easier to be fooled than admit you have been
- Distinct from intelligence
- Accepting grief
 - Loss of illusion



Self-Defense

Moral relativism / pragmatism

Science

- Objectivity
- Reason
- Empiricism

The best self defense is self discipline.

Thank You!

