



Optimizing treatment for men in secure settings

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Overview

Evolution

Masculinity

Compassion

Considerations

Organisation of the mind: Evolutionary approach



Gilbert and Simos (2022) Evolutionary Functional Analysis highlights that evolved motivation and emotional processes are underpinned by evolved, complex physiological *if A then* do B (stimulus response) algorithms which give rise to brain states.



For example, if a stimulus indicates threat, this triggers defensive behaviour. This is important to consider when there has been trauma

Evolution

Our evolution as a species mean that we have been shaped over millions of years to survive in the best way possible

Responses have been primed into our nervous systems, e.g. fight/ flight/ freeze/ fawn

Suffering is inevitable as part of that

Social Mentalities



Compassion focused therapy distinguishes between non-social and social motives



Understanding these distinctions is important because evolved motives and their algorithms and multiple derivatives are not only linked to different physiological systems, but are the primary organising functions of the mind, with emotions and cognitive competencies being recruited to pursue the goals of a motive(s).

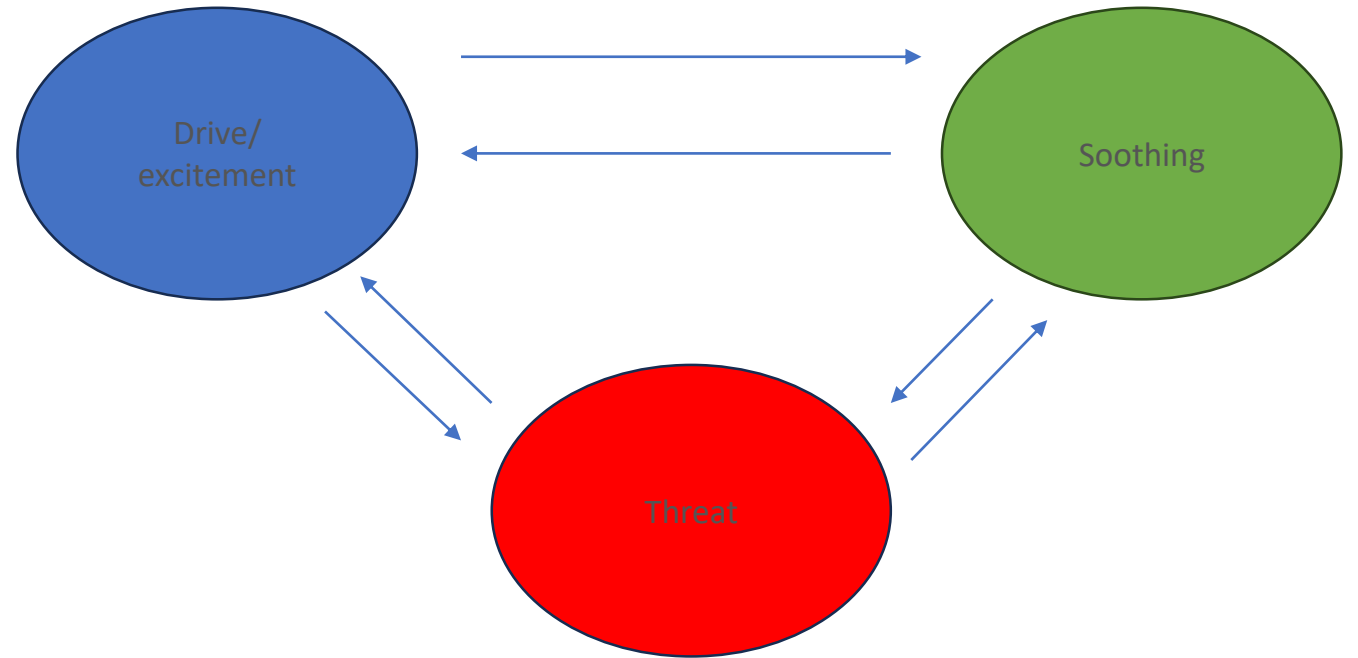


Basic Social Motives

- Gilbert (1989/2006) :
 - Care giving
 - Care seeking
 - Cooperating
 - Competing
 - Sexuality



Three
systems
(Gilbert,
2020)



Threat system

- When there is trauma the threat system becomes overly active
- Better to be safe than sorry
- Vulnerability becomes a no go area linked to survival
- Also linked to rejection and shame



Physiology

Sympathetic nervous system activation under threat decreases:

- Theory of mind
- Empathising
- Perspective taking

Parasympathetic system helps provide a feeling of safeness increases:

- Ability to activate the prefrontal cortex
- Enable mentalisation

Competitive system and social rank

Different strategies exist to engage in the environment we live in

The control and hold strategy is a dominant submissive strategy

Intrasexual competition – hierarchical patterns of relating

Winning shows increased activity, confidence and range of psycho physiological changes that seek resource control

Those who lose become wary of those above them, lose confidence and increased social withdrawal

In order to compete empathy for harm to the other turns off

Compassion



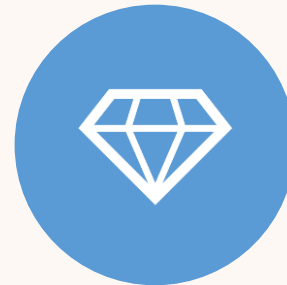
A sensitivity to the suffering/
distress of self and others
with a commitment to try
and alleviate and prevent it



We therefore need to
understand how to engage
with suffering by looking
into its causes



Work on alleviating and
preventing it



This requires the
foundations of wisdom,
courage and strength

Male socialisation

Berke et al (2018) boys may learn from their male peers that it is important to restrict emotional expression to meet social expectations about what it means to be a man and to avoid negative social consequences.

Lindsey (2016) spending time with same gender peers is associated with displays of anger in boys, suggesting that peer socialization of emotion among boys may encourage the inhibition of emotional expression, with the exception of anger.

Emotional avoidance and suppression

Men who have strongly internalized masculine ideology prescribing restrictive emotionality (i.e., cognitive masculinity factors) and those who experience significant stress in response to self perceived violations of this prescription (i.e., experiential masculinity factors) may be more likely to avoid or inhibit emotion.

Research by Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson (1999) found that men that experience Experiential avoidance (altering the form or frequency of internal experiences) and emotional inexpressivity, (tendency to inhibit the outward expression of emotion), have both been found to predict elevated physiological arousal and subjective distress in response to emotionally evocative stimuli

Emotional suppression

Kaiser et al (2020) found in a narrative review of studies that masculinity ideologies prescribing restrictive emotionality were more strongly associated with Post Traumatic Stress symptoms relative to other masculine norms.



Feeling
good and
secrecy

Porn

Sexual fantasy

Avoidance of shame

What
mentalities do
forensic
environments
foster?

- **Competitive**
 - Focused on moving through
 - Shaming and rank related
- Recognising procedures are dominance focused
- Challenge is how do you create a therapeutic caring environment?



Social mentalities (Gilbert, 2019)

Competitive mentality

Down rank

Social comparison – inferior
External shame
Submissive
Striving
Angry self-critical

Up rank

Social comparison
Superior – entitled
Humiliation
Aggressive
Striving
Other blaming/critical

Caring mentality

Process

Distress sensitivity
Able to help
Distress tolerant
Soothing – active
Joy – guilt
Empathic
Self reassuring

Masculinity and help seeking

- Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, there exists a hierarchical structure of masculinity where men who embody certain valued traits are considered superior to those who do not, leading to the marginalization of men who do not conform to these norms
- Mahalik et al (2003) and Wong et al (2017) found a conformity to masculinity norms and reluctance to seek help for psychological difficulties, whilst other studies have found an association with conformity to masculine norms and increased psychological distress (Wasyliw and Clairo, 2018)



Masculinity

Ramesh et al (2023) for both people in prison and officers, those conforming more with masculine norms were less likely to seek help

Younger participants both conformed more with masculine norms and also reported increased levels of distress.

Emotional expression seen as weakness

People also highlighted that although expression of vulnerability did not feel possible in a public space (e.g. while out on the wing), it was partially permitted to occur behind closed doors (e.g. in their cells) with particular trusted peers and this was a crucial source of support

How do people receive help?

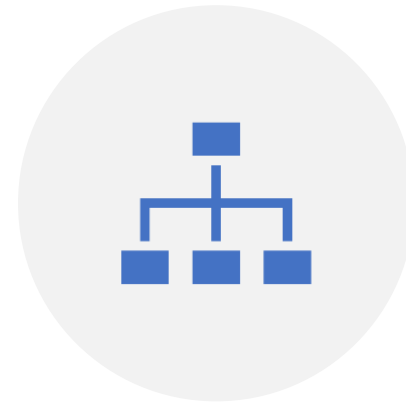


- Part of sentence plan
- Drive system activation linked to reward
- Seen as weakness, or life strategies have been survival focused and not able to depend on others

Blocks in secure environments



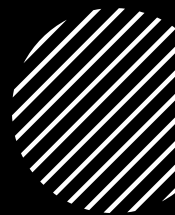
IN GROUP OUT GROUP
WAYS OF OPERATING



HIERARCHICAL WAYS
OF RELATING



How do we foster caring mentalities?



Proximately (physical only)



Secure base (create opportunities for the environment to be a source of security)



Safe haven – a place where distress can be regulated?



What are the social signals linked to sound, other peoples facial expressions?



Challenging systems

Rather, it is in the context of threatening environments where competitive motivations can lead towards self-focused tendencies rather than other-focused, and individuals with insecure attachments can feel socially vulnerable, which can lead to aggressive and dominant responding (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Fournier et al., 2002).

Therefore, competitive environments characterised by threats can help reinforce the hegemonic masculine stereotype, resulting in a cycle. Unfortunately, this competitive motive also makes us vulnerable to shame, self-criticism, social anxiety, and depression (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker, Canevello, Breines, & Flynn, 2010)

Retraumatization

Loss of autonomy and control within forensic environments

How to process difficult emotions which may leave practitioners feeling a range of emotions including pain, despair and lack of hope?

Vulnerability as strength

- Asking for help may be seen as weakness
- How to change narrative?
- Recognising that shut down and pushing through may be linked to trauma responses needed at the time are generational messages



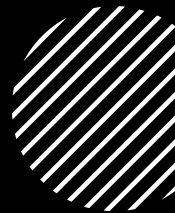
Expression of emotion

- Specific strategies, such as breathing practices, friendly voice tones, and facial and body expressions, can activate the parasympathetic system, aiming to calm and soothe the individual, which improves heart rate variability (Krygier et al., 2013)





Compassion training



Changing the organisation of the mind



Supported by Neuro physiological systems (vagus nerve, frontal cortex)



Leads to paying attention and engaging in behaviours that address suffering

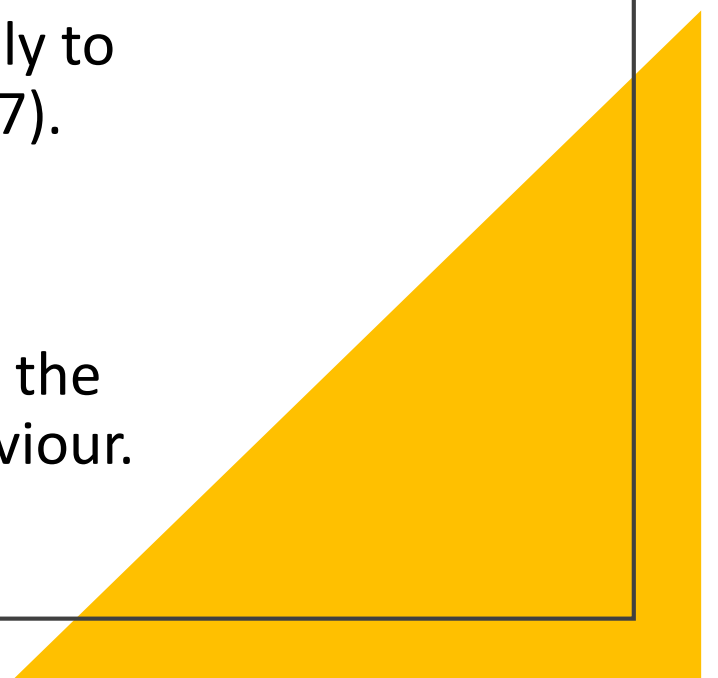


Regulates threat processing and promotes prosociality and wellbeing to self and others

Social safeness

One of the key evolutionary functions of parental investment is sensitivity to distress and preparedness to act appropriately to relieve that distress (Hrdy, 2009; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

This is also the basic sentiment and core of compassion (Gilbert, 2015), and as we will discuss, compassion utilises the same evolved physiological pathways as basic caring behaviour.



Institutional anxiety and responses



Creating spaces for reflection on behaviour without shaming



Emotion expression can elicit fear as can have anger associated with risk



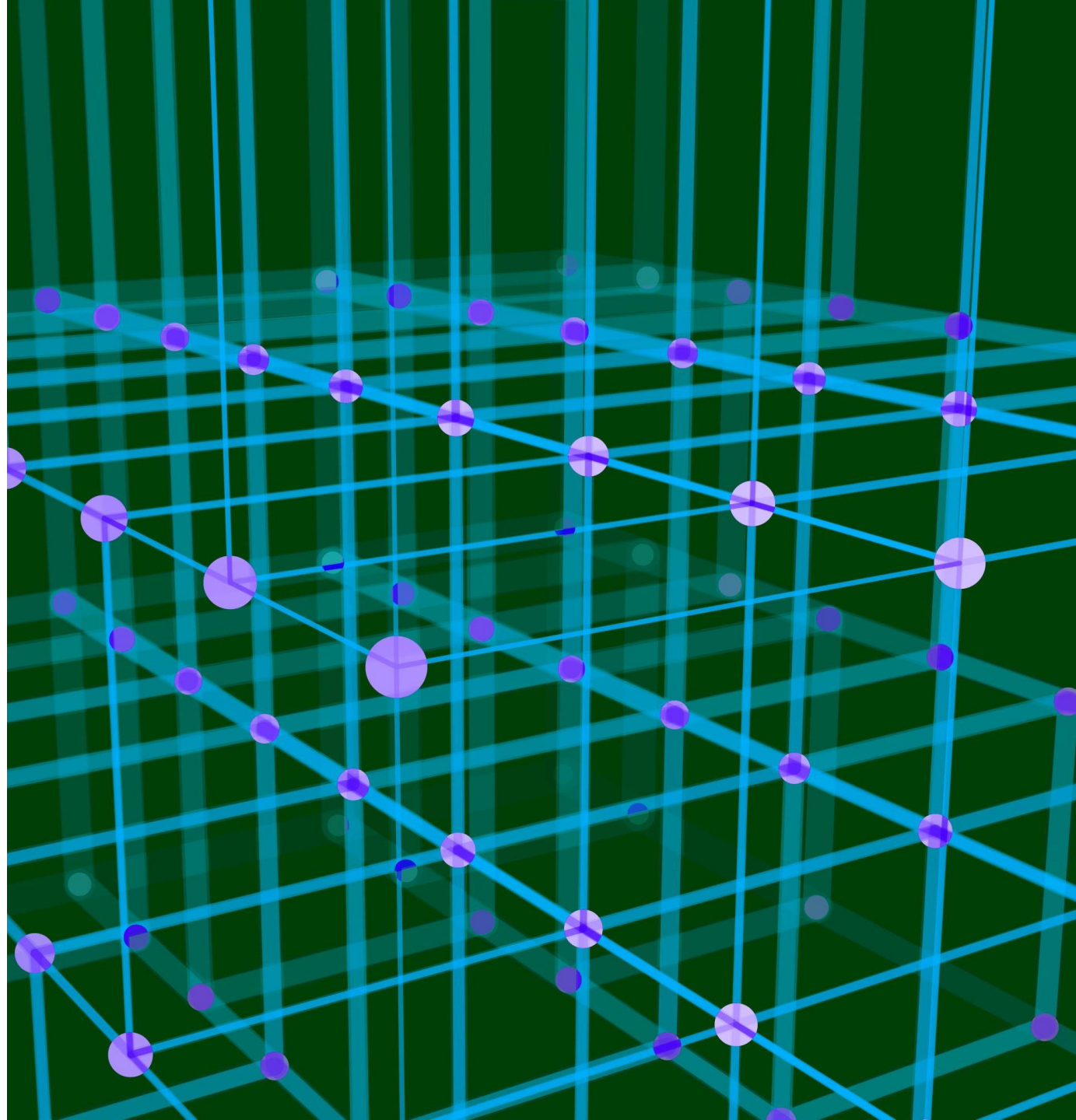
Leads to a respond where it can lead to further shame, punishment



How do we elicit reflection and curiosity with the individual?

Scaffolding

- Top down
 - Psycho education
 - De-shaming normal responses to trauma
- Bottom up
 - Yoga
 - Focusing on body
 - Opening spaces for creativity and play



Activating the caring/ affiliative system



Increasing social trust and
respect (belonging)



Encouraging openness and
transparency



Making a contribution/
difference to others
Peers mentors/ lived experience



Valuing diversity to prevent in
group out group behaviour and
the competitive system

Having difficult conversations


Intentions – explicit in
compassionate motivation

Wisdom and courage

Planning boundaries around
this – permission giving

Contracting responses





Thank you for
listening

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